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PR1 1977·VOLUME XLIV·NUMBER 1

CONTENTS

NOTES		**8**
ARTICLES		
Christopher Lasch	*The Narcissistic Personality of Our Time*	**9**
Emir Rodríguez Monegal	*The New Latin American Novelists*	**40**
Ronald Christ	*An Interview with Manuel Puig*	**52**
Barbara Rose	*America as Paradise*	**62**
Gary Stephens	*Haunted Americana*	**71**
Michael Rogin	*The Romance of the Self in Jacksonian America*	**98**
Peter Shaw	*Ezra Pound on American History*	**112**
STORIES		
José Donoso	*The Closed Door*	**20**
POEMS		
Frank O'Hara	*Poem During Poulenc's Gloria*	**85**
	She, Has She Bathed in Sound	**86**
Robert Duncan	*Circulations of the Song after Jalāl Al-Dīn Rūmī*	**87**
WRITERS FOR CARTER		
Robert Brustein		**106**
Hans J. Morgenthau		**107**
Maureen Howard		**107**
Robert Coles		**108**
Ronald Sukenick		**108**
Arthur Laurents		**109**

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Raymond S. Rubinow 109
Marya Mannes 109

A RETRACTION 111

BOOKS

Larry Woiwode	*I Would Have Saved Them If I Could* by Leonard Michaels	125
Donald Marshall	*A Map of Misreading* by Harold Bloom *Kabbalah and Criticism* by Harold Bloom *The Fate of Reading* by Geoffrey Hartman	131
Joel Schechter	*Puss in Boots* by Ludwig Tieck	135
Ernest Gellner	*Twilight of Authority* by Robert Nisbet	139
Robert Seidman	*High Windows* by Philip Larkin	143
James Atlas	*Pity the Monsters* by Alan Williamson	149
Rose Laub Coser	*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* by Juliet Mitchell	152

WRITERS' CHOICE 157

Leslie Epstein

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NOTES

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Christopher Lasch

THE NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY OF OUR TIME

The survival of any form of human society depends on two things, the production of the necessities of life and the reproduction of the labor force itself. Reproduction includes not merely the propagation of the species but also the care and nuture of the young — education, training, discipline, and cultural transmission.

In the early days of industrial capitalism, the work of socialization took place largely in the family. The capitalist attempted to supervise his workers' lives on the job, but his control ended when the workers left the factory at closing time. Even when Henry Ford established a "Sociological Department" in the Ford Motor Works in 1914, he saw the supervision of the workers' private lives merely as a means of making the men sober, thrifty, industrious producers. Only a handful of employers at this time understood that the success of the mass production economy now required not only the capitalistic organization of production but the organization of consumption and leisure as well.

"Mass production," said the Boston department store magnate Edward A. Filene in 1919, "demands the education of the masses; the masses must learn to behave like human beings in a mass production world....They must achieve, not mere literacy, but culture." In other words, the mass production of commodities in ever-increasing abundance demands a mass market to absorb them.

Today the "education" of the masses has proved to be one of the most important elements not only in the emergence of an economy based on mass consumption but in the transformation of the family. In the course of bringing "culture" to the masses, the advertising industry, the school, and the mental health and welfare services have

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taken over many of the socializing functions of the home and have brought the ones that remain under the direction of modern science and technology.

While glorifying domestic life as the last haven of intimacy, these agencies of mass tuition have propagated the view that the family cannot provide for its own needs without outside assistance. The advertising industry insists that the health and safety of the young, the satisfaction of their daily nutritional requirements, their emotional and intellectual development, and their ability to compete with their peers for popularity and success all depend on consumption of vitamins, band-aids, cavity-preventing toothpaste, cereals, mouthwashes, and laxatives. "Domestic science" urges the housewife and mother to systematize housekeeping and to give up the rule-of-thumb procedures of earlier generations. Modern medicine orders the abandonment of home remedies. The mental health movement teaches that maternal "instinct" cannot be trusted in childrearing. Even the sex instinct has come to be surrounded by a growing body of scientific analysis and commentary, according to which sexual enjoyment depends on study, technique, discipline, and control. While endlessly extolling the joy of sex, the therapeutic community stresses the need for technique, planning, and study. Satisfaction "does not occur automatically but must be striven for." "Sexual relations are something to be worked at and developed." "Sex is often something to be worked and strained at." The couple must not rely on their natural proclivities. Sex should be studied. "The technique of the sexual relation has to be learned in order to develop a satisfactory sex life." "...The average woman of our time and clime must *learn* to develop specific sexual enjoyment, and only gradually attains to the orgasm in coitus....They have to learn how to feel both voluptuous pleasure and actual orgasm." Sex requires "study, training, and conscious effort." The sex act must be scheduled: "Husbands and wives should rarely presume to begin love-play that may lead to coitus unless they can have an hour free from interruptions." In a word, sex, supervised by trained experts, is assimilated to the model of industrial discipline. The growth of advertising and the helping professions has obliterated the distinction between work and play and thus vitiated the privacy or "privatism" they have done so much to celebrate.

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The diffusion of the new ideology of social welfare and "civilized" consumption has had the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy. By convincing the housewife, and finally even her husband as well, to rely on outside technology and the advice of outside experts, the apparatus of mass tuition—the successor to the church in our secular society—has undermined the family's capacity to provide for itself and has thereby justified the continuing expansion of health, education, and welfare services. This process has altered both the sexual and the generational balance of forces within the family. According to the new ideology of consumption and well-being which has flourished ever since the twenties, women have to be educated for new responsibilities, to become equal in the management of household expenditures, to achieve equality in order to enjoy sex and to satisfy their husbands, and in the last analysis to become wage earners, since the logic of consumption requires that every member of the family have an independent income or at least aspire to one.

Similarly the new forces have allied themselves with the younger generation against the older. Advertising glorifies youth. Educators insist on the "needs" of the young. So does psychiatry. All maintain that the needs of the young should occupy the first place in their parents' thoughts. The family is to be organized around the requirements of the future generation.

At the same time, the new forces have undermined parents' confidence in their ability to provide for those needs. According to the reigning orthodoxy, only modern science and technology can provide for them.

Since the "helping professions" now impinge in so many ways on the family, it is important for students of the family to study the ideology of social workers, teachers, juvenile court officers, marital counsellors, doctors, and psychiatrists. Older studies, such as those by Kingsley Davis and C. Wright Mills, had the merit of recognizing that social pathologists had developed an ideology and that this ideology was an important agency of social control. But when they accused the ideology of mental hygiene of providing a scientific rationale for "Protestant individualism," in Davis's formulation, of shoring up "norms and traits ideally associated with small-town, middle-class milieux" in Mills's, and of upholding an obsolete, patriarchal model of the family, these authors went far off the mark.

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On the contrary, social pathologists played a leading role in undermining Protestant individualism, rural values, and the old-style family. They promoted a "democratic" conception of domestic life, advocated permissive childrearing, defended the rights of women, attacked sexual repression and censorship, and sought to make the members of the family more responsive to each others' emotional needs, more skilled at communicating their own, and more adept, in short, in the art of interpersonal relations. John R. Seeley and his collaborators got closer to the truth when they noted, in their study of "Crestwood Heights," the implicit feminism of the social relations experts and their alliance with women against patriarchal values. Indeed the mental health movement, and more broadly the "helping professions," positioned themselves in the vanguard of the revolt against old-fashioned middle-class values, and their ideology, rather than harking back to the past, well suited the needs of a society based not so much on hard work as on consumption, the search for personal fulfillment, and the management of interpersonal relations.

It cannot even be said that the health industry seeks to shore up the nuclear family by reorganizing it on a more "democratic" basis. This may have been true earlier in the century, but the ideology of the health industry—the cult of undemanding interpersonal relations—has become increasingly independent of specific positions for or against marriage and the monogamous family. Both the friends and enemies of monogamy uphold divorce as a "creative act"—the friends of marriage because it provides a necessary safety-valve and its enemies because it can be seen as a step toward some new kind of family structure. Both camps extol "non-binding commitments" and reject as "role-playing" demands that individuals live up to predetermined expectations, whether externally imposed or self-imposed. Both sides—if one can speak of sides at all, in a debate where the points in contention have become so amorphous—seek to free the individual from guilt or failure and condemn "unrealistic" expectations that are likely to give rise to those emotions. Both sides condemn what they call romantic love, in their view the most unrealistic expectation of all.

The praise of pure pleasure, emotional health, and easygoing interpersonal relations, which has displaced the work ethic as the dominant sensibility, thus reflects the growing influence of the

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mental health industry and the helping professions; but it also reflects the psychic needs of modern society itself. The fear and rejection of parenthood, the tendency to view the family as nothing more than marriage, and the perception of marriage as merely one in a series of "non-binding commitments," express waning confidence in the public order and growing doubts, by no means unjustified by the course of historical events, in the ability of society's rulers to rule. Claiming to represent the future, the ideology of interpersonal relations regards the future with dread; it represents the final dissolution of bourgeois optimism and self-confidence.

In order to understand the psychic needs to which the new therapeutic view of the world corresponds, we need to return to the subject of socialization, as transformed by the "socialization" of reproduction. Briefly, the socialization of reproduction has weakened not only the father's position but the mother's as well. Instead of imposing their own standards of right and wrong, now thoroughly confused, parents influenced by psychiatry and the doctrines of progressive education seek to understand the peculiar needs of the young and to avoid painful confrontations. Instead of guiding the child, the older generation struggles to "keep up with the kids," to master their incomprehensible jargon, and even to imitate their dress and manners in the hope of preserving a youthful appearance and outlook.

Under these conditions, children grow up without forming strong identifications with their parents, formerly the psychological basis of such autonomy as human beings attained. Lacking these introjects, the child becomes an "other-directed"—or better, a narcissistic—adult, an adult more concerned with his own pleasure and the approval of others than with leaving his mark on the world. The ease with which he escapes emotional entanglements with the older generation leaves him with a feeling not of liberation but of inner emptiness. Young people today often reproach their parents with indifference or neglect, and many of them seek warmth and security in submission to spiritual healers, gurus, and prophets of political or psychic transformation.

Permissive styles of childrearing, instead of encouraging self-reliance and autonomy, as might have been expected, appear instead to intensify the appetite for dependence. The only alternative to the

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superego, it has been said, is the superstate. Formerly the internalization of parental authority enabled the young to overcome childhood dependency and to become morally autonomous. Today the wish for dependence persists into later life, laying the psychological foundations of new forms of authoritarianism.

The pursuit of self-interest, formerly identified with the rational pursuit of gain and the accumulation of wealth, has degenerated into a search for pleasure that represents both the logical fulfillment and the negation of bourgeois individualism. The work ethic has given way to a "fun morality," the spirit of calculation to concern with personal well-being and psychic health. Economic man has yielded the stage to "psychological man," who lives "with a minimum of pretense to anything more grand than sweetening the time." Where the economic man justified self-aggrandizement in the name of a higher purpose, whether it was conceived as a calling pleasing to God, the increase of national wealth, or the material progress of the race, psychological man exists "with no higher purpose than that of a durable sense of well-being." Economic man sought to impose his ego on others; his successor needs to assure himself that he still has an ego. Economic man was selfish—ruthless in the pursuit of his own interests and greedy for goods; psychological man is merely narcissistic, equally insatiable in his appetites but incapable of appeasing the inner emptiness from which they arise in such profusion.

The recital of these contrasts should elicit neither indignation nor sorrow. It is pointless to mourn the passing of an individualism which cannot be revived by exhortation, and which in any case added as much to the world's misery as it ever contributed to the world's spiritual enrichment. It would be equally pointless to hope for the revival of the old-style family, so often romanticized at some earlier point in its history. Pleas for the reestablishment of paternal authority, sexual repression, and the work ethic will not reverse changes in the structure and emotional organization of family life, which have been under way for a long time and reflect basic changes in the organization of production. These changes in family structure have brought into being a new kind of personality. Instead of deploring or

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celebrating its emergence, we should attempt to understand more clearly what distinguishes "psychological man" from his immediate predecessor.

Twenty or thirty years ago, when the study of culture, personality, and "national character" still engaged the attention of social scientists, a number of writers attempted to identify the massive shift in character structure that seemed to be taking place. David Riesman in his concept of the other-directed man, William F. Whyte in the "organization man," Eric Fromm in the "market-oriented" personality, Karen Horney in the "neurotic personality of our time," Margaret Mead and Geoffrey Gorer in their studies of American national character, Philip Rieff in his "psychological man," and more recently Robert Jay Lifton in his analysis of the "protean man," described from different points of view the typical personality that our society requires and seeks to produce through the agencies of socialization and cultural transmission. All of these characterizations capture essential features of the new man: his eagerness to get along well with others; his need to organize even his private life in accordance with the requirements of large organizations; his attempt to "sell himself " as if his own personality were a commodity with an assignable market value; his neurotic need for affection, reassurance, and oral gratification; his inability to internalize "clearly defined criteria of right and wrong." Taken together, these characteristics define a narcissistic personality dominated by pre-Oedipal impulses and by the intolerable anxieties they arouse.

Clinical evidence supports the view that narcissism is the essential feature of the contemporary personality. Whereas psychiatric patients formerly suffered from hysteria and obsessional neuroses, now they suffer from "pervasive feelings of emptiness and a deep disturbance of self-esteem." Freud's patients sought relief from guilt, from the tyranny of the superego; "but guilt already presupposes a 'self ' which can feel it," whereas "the narcissistic personality disorders, on the other hand,...have wounds indicative of still earlier battles, fought and lost." Unsuccessful struggles to overcome oral-sadistic impulses against the mother, to conquer fears of the parental penis and vagina, and thus to direct self-love to others, underlie the "characterological disorders" with which modern psychiatry so often has to contend. The same struggles, "fought and lost," manifest

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themselves also in "normal" everyday life. The fear of competition as inevitably annihilating, based on the fear of destructive impulses within the self, contributes to the "other-directed" individual's eagerness to cooperate with others, to make himself agreeable, and to market his attractively packaged personality. The narcissist's fear of sexuality and his idealization of the mother-baby relationship drive him to treat love as a means either of reassurance or sexual revenge. The aggression he directs against his own ego makes him chronically depressed and obsessed with the state of his own health, the restoration of which becomes the principal goal of the "therapeutic's" existence. Meanwhile the sense of fatherlessness makes him indifferent to traditional appeals to right and wrong, indeed to any considerations beyond his own immediate welfare.

In his relations with others, the narcissist seeks emotional security without emotional entanglement. Lacking any sense of his own worth, he needs assurance that others value him "as a person." Friendly relations with others, when conducted at a low level of emotional intensity, serve to reassure him, moreover, that he has got the better of his aggressive impulses; for this reason he goes out of his way to avoid relations tinged with tension or rivalry. Interpersonal relations mean more to him than to the old-style individualist intent on pleasing God, changing the world, or imposing his will on his fellow men; yet he is afraid to "get too involved," preferring a cool and casual style of friendship to one that makes heavy demands. Narcissus seeks neither to impose his will on others nor to surrender it to a transcendent passion. He seeks only to elicit esteem and affection. In friendships, casual affairs, and everyday intercourse he tries to appease the sense of his own emptiness and incapacity. He needs to reaffirm his ability to feel at the same time that he keeps his feelings under control; strong emotions threaten his inner equilibrium, always precarious at best.

The prevailing mode of interpersonal relations, in a society organized around the "production of personality," entails an apparent inconsistency. On the one hand, experts in interpersonal relations advise people to "get in touch with their feelings"; on the other hand, they discourage excessive emotion. Success in interpersonal relations, it would seem, depends on the ability to manipulate the emotions of others while remaining emotionless yourself. You need

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to discover your own feelings, not in order to surrender to them, but in order to understand your own wishes and articulate them with an eye to dramatic effect.

Transactional analysis, "Parent Effectiveness Training," open marriage, and other programs of psychic self-help all teach that it is better to feel than to think. Everyday speech indicates the degree to which practice now conforms to psychiatric theory: "I feel" has displaced "I think" as the prelude even to statements that purport to describe objective reality. Statements about reality thus dissolve into opinions and finally into mere expressions of personal feeling.

According to the experts, objective statements should be excluded from interpersonal intercourse, in the first place because it is impossible to argue about beliefs and in the second place because statements about reality convey ethical judgments and therefore arouse strong emotions. According to Haim Ginott, "When a child says, 'I never have good luck,' no argument or explanation will change his belief." All the parent can do "is to show him how intimately we understand the feelings that lead him to his belief." "When a child tells of an event, it is sometimes helpful to respond, not to the event itself, but to the feelings around it." Ginott says that since "all feelings are legitimate," their expression should be greeted neither with praise nor with blame. If a child does something to annoy the parent, the parent should express his annoyance instead of condemning the child or the action. If the child expresses emotions that seem incommensurate with the occasion, the parent instead of pointing out this discrepancy—instead of making an objective statement about reality and the emotions appropriate to it—should show the child that he understands the child's feelings and his right to express them. "It is more important for a child to know what he feels than why he feels it." It is important also for the child to learn "that his own anger is not catastrophic, that it can be discharged without destroying anyone."

In its insistence that wishes are harmless, modern psychiatry both shapes and reflects popular thought, which seeks to stifle a murderous inner rage by reminding itself that actions alone can kill. The attempt to find "civilized outlets for savage feelings," however, necessarily fails when all feelings are treated as equally legitimate. In the very act of upholding the importance of feeling, the modern

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sensibility denies its importance by treating feelings as harmless and allowing them unlimited expression. Under the conditions of interpersonal intercourse that ideally prevail, the expression of emotion provokes no stronger response than sympathetic understanding; but the endless understanding with which the narcissist is surrounded by lovers, parents, teachers, psychiatrists, and even law-enforcement agencies, far from alleviating the fear of his own emotions, makes it unbearable. He dreads the moment when patient understanding exhausts itself and his destructive impulses finally provoke the retaliation they deserve. The indefinite postponement of this reckoning heightens his anxiety instead of allaying it.

Psychological man has invented a new style of personal relations, cool, wary, and undemanding. His avoidance of emotional entanglements and of "judgmental" attitudes towards others reflects, at bottom, a narcissistic withdrawal of interest in the outside world. Other people matter only as they impinge on the self; subjective feelings take precedence over the objective world outside the ego.

Not only personal interaction but the prevailing modes of thinking and perception bear the imprint of the narcissist's distinctive style. The contemporary sensibility makes a sharp distinction between fact and value; no other teaching of the social sciences—which so accurately express the needs of the new man—has gained more widespread acceptance than the importance of separating "value judgments" from "objective" truths. This type of thought presupposes a withdrawal of interest from externals, a devaluation of the outer world in two senses. The attempt to banish value judgments from the description of external reality means that reality has lost its value except as it affects the ego. No longer able to recognize in society the collective creation of human labor and ingenuity, men perceive it as wholly alien and external, obedient to objective laws that work independently of human volition. As society becomes increasingly resistant to any form of human intervention, this illusion of objectivity corresponds to everyday experience. Men despair of humanizing the social order and lapse not only into the well-known political apathy of our time but into intellectual apathy as well. The social order no longer excites a passionate curiosity to understand it. Instead, the attempt to understand it has been deliberately drained of passion and monopolized, moreover, by trained specialists, soft-

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spoken academic bureaucrats. In the popular mind these specialists are indistinguishable from the white-coated men of science who take to television in order to extol the advantages of certain brands of aspirin. All experts appear to the public more or less as doctors, and this perception, however distorted, contains a certain truth. Social "scientists" betray no more emotion about society than doctors feel toward the human body; their profession has grown up side by side with the "helping professions" and the mental health industry; and their pronouncements, delivered with an air of detachment in language technical and obscure, hold the same interest for the general public as the pronouncements of physicians—the mild interest that adheres to any statements that seem to promise better health and a sense of well-being.

When the external world loses its savor, the self retreats to a preoccupation with its own immediate interests, its unfulfilled desires, the state of its health. Psychological regression expresses itself intellectually in the perception that values are purely subjective. "Good" is what is good for me. On this view, ethical statements merely rationalize self-interest, and since individual interests diverge, everyone has "the right to his own opinion." "One man's opinion is as good as that of another." The devaluation of values precludes any rational discussion of values. *Chacun a son gout;* no one can argue about tastes, preferences, or opinions. Thought mirrors the fragmentation of society. Atomized individualism finally reduces the individual to pure subjectivity and thus negates individualism by carrying it to its logical conclusion: the war of all against all. Incapable of reasoned discourse, the modern Narcissus—the consumer par excellence—can articulate only his own wants. Public discourse comes to an end, and private conversation degenerates into an unintelligible babble, a never-ending assertion of wishes demanding fulfillment.

Note: An unpublished paper by Renate Bridenthal of Brooklyn College, "Towards a Theory of Women's History," has helped me to clarify my thoughts on the socialization of reproduction. I should also like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Conciousness* (New York, 1976); Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York, 1968); Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia* (Boston, 1975); and Michael Beldoch, "The Therapeutic as Narcissist," *Salmagundi,* no. 20 (1972).

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José Donoso

THE CLOSED DOOR

Adela de Rengifo often complained that destiny had dealt her all the blows of life: she had been widowed at twenty-five, she was poor and had to work to support herself with some dignity, and she had a sickly little son—well, not actually sickly, but weak, one of those children who sleeps twice as much as normal children.

In fact, from the time he was born, Sebastián had slept a lot. He closed his eyes as soon as his head touched the pillow his mother had embroidered with such care, and in a second he was sleeping angelically.

"He's such a good and quiet child, the poor thing," his mother would say to the women at the office. "He doesn't wake up crying in the middle of the night like most children."

Adela and Sebastián lived in two rooms on the second floor of a slightly damp and dark boarding house. The rooms weren't too bad, although the windows opened on a light well. When Adela went to work in the morning, Mrs. Mechita, the landlady, took care of Sebastián. But since the child was so quiet, he didn't need much care; he never bothered anybody with the noise and games with which other five-year-olds make life impossible. As soon as Mrs. Mechita began her morning chores, Sebastián would slip back to his room, climb into bed and sleep like a log. Mrs. Mechita would go look at him, because it gave her "a funny feeling" that a boy of his age liked to sleep instead of amusing himself with things that were more...well, more normal. One afternoon, deciding it was her duty to point out the boy's peculiarity to Adela, she played the innocent, and never raising her eyes from the crocheting that always kept her freckled fingers busy, said: "That child's quite the one for sleeping,

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isn't he, Adelita! Is he ill?"

Adela answered, very stiffly: "What's so odd about a child sleeping when he feels like it?"

"Well, it was just a remark..." Mrs. Mechita replied. When Adela left, Mrs. Mechita set her mastifflike jaw, reflecting that young widows were too high-strung and in the future she would be careful not to take another into her boarding house.

Mrs. Mechita's remark mirrored Adela's own anxieties, and she couldn't put it out of her mind. It was a fact that Sebastián slept too much. It wasn't that he was half asleep all day long, but that suddenly, for no good reason, he seemed to feel it would be nice to sleep for a while, and so he did, like a person concentrating on a highly amusing hobby, curled up on his small bed with brass bars or sitting on a chair. Uneasy, his mother would sometimes watch him sleep. This quieted her fears, because surely nothing bad could happen to a being who slept with such a blissful face, as if behind his eyelids scenes from a magical life were floating by.

But much as she tried not to get upset, Adela could not deny that Sebastián was different. How could she help feeling uncomfortable? Diffident and solitary, he didn't seem to have any connection with what happened around him, neither to people nor things, nor to cold nor heat, nor the constant winter rain splashing on the dust-covered glass of the vestibule skylight. Like the moon, Sebastián only showed half of himself to the world. It was a little frightening. The other boarders were kind to him, more than anything else to please Adela, who was a respectable lady even though she had had a tough life. But she didn't fool herself: she knew nobody liked Sebastián. It did pain her soul, but she knew they were partly right, because it was too odd that a child of five slept so much and didn't like to do anything else. It wasn't that he dozed off because he was sleepy or tired; instead, picking the right time, he would start in sleeping, the way ordinary children start in playing marbles or singing. He didn't have playmates his own age. Books, magazines, and movies bored him. He didn't like to play games. The only thing he seemed to want to do was give up everything and curl up in his bed and sleep.

One day Adelia asked him: "What do you dream about, Sebastián?"

"Do I dream?"

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"Yes, don't you see visions when you're asleep, like people or stories?" Sebastián patted his mother's hands while answering. "No, I guess not. I don't remember..."

Adela was exasperated. "Then why do you sleep so much if you don't get anything out of it?"

"It's just that I like to, mama...."

Hearing this, Adela got really angry. She was obliged to work and sacrifice herself to support him. She was still young and pretty, and yet for her son's sake she didn't accept the propositions of the men who were after her in the office. For his sake, for his sake...thousands of deprivations and sorrows, while he indulged himself in the pleasure of sleeping all day long. And he slept because he liked to, no other reason. She regretted having allowed Sebastián to develop the habit of doing things just because he felt like it: it was a dangerous attitude, immoral even. In the beginning, she had to admit, she obscurely intuited some mysterious function in her son's sleeping, as if those dreams held a treasure, something that, although neither he nor she understood it, might reveal itself in the future as something useful or important. This vague hope had kept her silent with some trepidation. But if it was just a whim, it was indecent! She had her whims too and would have been glad to indulge them.

"Well, mama," said Sebastián, intimidated by his mother's fit of temper, "if you want me to, I'll sleep only at night."

Adela's heart stopped, as if she were on the verge of falling into a well. After a long pause, she asked him in a very serious and deliberate voice: "Then it's something you do when you want, just because? You can control it?"

"Yes, I sleep when I feel like sleeping...."

And seeing her son standing in front of her, so strange, dedicated to something neither of them understood, gazing at her with his poor, serious blue eyes, she felt love overflow inside her and she couldn't stop hugging and kissing him and squeezing him hard against her body.

"No, no, baby," she said. "You just sleep as much as you want."

She reflected bitterly that Sebastián was the spitting image of his father, handsome, but perhaps a little on the slow side. At least he wasn't as smart as Carlos Zauze, her department head at the

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office, who never gave up trying and was always asking her out and making passes at her; he was respectful enough, but temptingly persistent. Nobody who was all there could enjoy anything as colorless, as substanceless as constant sleep. Well, anyway, next year when he started school she would find out soon enough how intelligent her son was.

At school, Sebastián was, if not brilliant, at least diligent. Docile and quiet, he did what he was asked to do, but not so much as to make himself conspicuous. He did everything in an impersonal way, so that people would leave him alone and he wouldn't have to associate with classmates or teachers.

He never went out with friends on holidays. In the afternoon, when school was over, the other children, dusty and tired, would stop to buy candy and make a little mischief before breaking up for the day. But Sebastián went straight home, had tea, and did his homework, thereby earning the right to do as he pleased. Then he would lie down to sleep as if unwilling to waste another second. Saturdays and Sundays he did the same thing. He slept from sunrise to sunset, knowing his behavior and report card prevented Adela's saying anything about it.

Adela sometimes went into his bedroom to watch her son sleeping. There she was unnerved by her old fear—and by an even more serious and disturbing element: respect. She sensed there was something in his sleeping that eluded her, something too big or too subtle to be caught in the small, rather limited net of her imagination. The most disturbing thing was that Sebastián always smiled in his sleep—not the ordinary, reassuring smile of a child dreaming about houses and cars and nice things, and feeling watched over by a beautiful mommy and a powerful daddy. No. This was different. It was as if his spirit left his body to dwell in a wonderful world hidden behind his eyelids. His whole being seemed to be there, inside his sleep, leaving nothing outside to comfort his lonely, watchful mother. There was an almost savage intensity about it, giving the impression that Sebastián's dreaming was complete in itself, powerfully closed, self-sufficient, needing none of the people or the things of the world, including her. She was a shadow that could easily be excluded from any pleasure. For Adela, to watch him sleep was to intuit, cruelly and confusingly, everything she had

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never been nor ever could be nor ever would understand. And when Sebastián came to be fifteen or sixteen, he seemed to have left his mother so far behind that he could hardly make her out, like a meaningless dot an instant before vanishing at the end of the road.

At this time, Adela, in her early forties, could not continue resisting the advances of Carlos Zauze, who had been after her for so many long years. It was her last chance and she had to take it because she couldn't go on withering away in a cold room at Mrs. Mechita's boarding house. She went out for meals and walks with her admirer, they went to dances and movies together, and for a time Adela was blissful with this life and its new joys. After two months, Zauze asked her to marry him. She happily said yes, and immediately they became lovers. While her son dreamed vague improbabilities in the adjacent room, Adela's dreams were filled with a ticklish moustache and the warmth of masculine legs next to her own. She was not lonely anymore; she was no longer cut off from life by the mysterious diffidence of her son. However, once Carlos Zauze's love was consummated, it slowly waned. Marriage was mentioned less frequently. Tears flowed. Then, perhaps because of the tears, love was mentioned less frequently, until finally they hardly ever saw each other and it became clear that the boss's attention had turned elsewhere, toward a secretary in the personnel department two floors down, a young blonde who was very forward, or so her coworkers informed her.

It took her a while to get over Zauze, but nobody could say she lost her composure. It was too bad she had already told Sebastián she was getting married and was going to give him a new father. Now she was in the uncomfortable position of having to tell him that destiny had destroyed that illusion too.

"Don't you have anything to say?" asked Adela when she realized her confidences didn't upset her son. "Stop playing with that bottle of salad oil, you'll stain your clothes. I suppose you think your clothes don't cost money?"

Blowing her nose, she added: "You don't care what happens to me."

"Yes I do, mama," Sebastián answered. "How can you think I don't?"

Adela, sobbing, said: "No you don't. I'm nothing to you.

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You're a selfish boy and I'm sick and tired of having to work and live alone. I must be getting old. Yesterday I had to order a pair of glasses because the eye doctor told me I'm far-sighted."

At this, she began crying again.

"Mama, please don't cry. Here, blow your nose. We've already talked about your job. I finish school this year and I'll get a good job. I want to make money and support you. Besides, I'm almost seventeen and want to enjoy myself too."

Adela stopped crying suddenly and glared at him. "But the only thing you enjoy is sleep, like a cretin!"

Now Sebastián looked at his mother and she froze: it was as if he did not see her. Her heart stopped: in that glance she discerned all the incomprehensible and elusive things about her son's life, and again she burst into tears. However, through tears and lamentations, she managed to ask him, for the first time, what his sleeping meant. If she didn't ask him now, she would never again be able to, and she couldn't go on living surrounded by so much dryness, so much loneliness.

"How can I tell you when *I* don't understand?" he answered serenely. Adela, no calmer, shifted the lampshade so the pink light would bathe her son's face, leaving her own in the shadows. "It's as if I had been born with this gift for sleeping as much as I want, whenever I want. And maybe because it's so easy for me, it's the only thing I like to do. It's as though everything else was shadow and didn't matter. But I've never really understood what's wrong with me. For me, every possible happiness lies in sleeping, this act that seems so poor and absurd, but I was born to do it and it's the only thing that matters to me. I have the feeling that I dream and am happy, that I dream about something real and magical, like a world of light that will make everything clear, not just for me, but through me, for all people. But when I wake up, I feel a door has closed on the things I dreamed, shutting me off from them, keeping me from remembering what was in the dream, and that door will not allow me to bring the happiness of the dream world back to this life, to this reality in which other people live. I need to open that door. And that's why I have to sleep so much, until I tear that door down, until I remember the happiness in my dream. One day perhaps..."

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"But, son, you must be crazy, the only people who can do that are the ones who die—"

"No, mama, not die. The dead don't dream. You have to be alive to dream, that's why I have to go on living. I haven't dedicated my entire life to sleeping, but sometimes I feel I ought to even though I don't know what I'm going to find behind that door. I may discover that giving up living like other people was a mistake, that finding out what was behind the door wasn't worth the trouble. But I don't care. The fact that I'm living for a genuine purpose justifies my life and makes sense of it. I think of other people's lives and I pity them because they lack that core I have, because they don't experience the fever that drives me. And if what's behind that door turns out to be what I think, if there is light, if there is something that will allow understanding, and at the same time will explain..."

The year after, Sebastián got a job and his mother quit hers. Adela had aged greatly. It was as if seeing Sebastián tired her terribly, as if thinking about him squeezed her dry. She felt destiny had been hard on her, had demanded too much from her, had given her very little in exchange. She consoled herself by playing cards with Mrs. Mechita and calling up her former coworkers from time to time to hear what was going on at the office. With her modest pension and Sebastián's salary, they had enough to get along, and they went on living in the same rooms at the boarding house, with potted ferns set in the middle of immaculate doilies, and the smell of moth-eaten plush curtains.

At the office Sebastián didn't say much to his colleagues. He felt that to make friends, start any relationship that wasn't purely formal, would be to betray his vocation for sleep. He was rather tall and thin and seemed to be made of a fragile and transparent substance different from flesh. This gave him such an interesting appearance that while the girls in the office were powdering their noses or correcting imaginary defects in their hairdos, they would watch him and giggle, regretting he was so young. He had strange blue eyes that were very pretty.

"The eyes of a saint," one of the girls said.

"Or an artist," said another.

"No, the eyes of a great lover," corrected the boldest of them.

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But when Sebastián responded to any of their questions or jibes, his manner was so calm and pleasant, so serene and pure, that they felt defeated, as if he saw them as mere empty shells. They quit teasing him, and Sebastián managed to assume the role of an efficient shadow, letting his silence show that he was a bird of a different feather, that he had neither the time nor the inclination for that kind of game. The department boss, Aquiles Marambio, who was only ten years older than Sebastián, took him under his wing. Since Marambio talked a great deal and was only interested in listening to himself, he wasn't aware that Sebastián paid no attention to what he was saying. He would sit down beside him and address long harangues to him.

"You've got a great future in this organization, Rengifo, because I'm a good judge of character and I know you're a very serious and capable fellow. Guess how many calculators they sent us from North America? Gorgeous, brand-new machines. The only thing they can't do is talk. Can't you guess? Eighty! Can you imagine what we can do with eighty calculators? Well, I'd say we can do just about anything, anything at all. Don't you agree?"

Aquiles Marambio was short and slight, with a tiny, sparse, black moustache and gold-rimmed glasses. Although he wore dark suits pinched at the waist, he was beginning to show a pot belly; his pointed chin was already doubling up and quaked like a child about to cry whenever anybody disobeyed his instructions or committed some offense against hygiene or punctuality.

Once, after much insistence from his boss, Sebastián accepted an invitation to dine at his house. Seating himself at the table, Aquiles Marambio unfolded his napkin, stuffing two of its corners into his vest pockets, and settled in to wait for dinner, extolling the joys of having one's own house, one's own wife, one's own radio and washing machine. Meanwhile his wife, without parting her lips, displayed an approving smile like a person who holds up a defensive weapon; her heart was not at the dinner table but in the kitchen, and she was praying to God the new cook wouldn't let the roast burn.

After much beating around the bush, Aquiles cleared his throat. "See here, Rengifo, there is something I want to talk to you about."

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"Yes?"

"Yes," Marambio answered. After a pause he went on: "Look, the thing is this. Everybody at the office thinks highly of you because you're efficient and polite. But, you know, in an office the main thing is team spirit. We should work as a family. Otherwise it's impossible to be efficient. People like you, but I have to tell you frankly that they're beginning to wonder about you. They think you're strange, stuck-up. They invite you to parties and outings, they ask you to have a drink or go to the movies, and you've never once accepted. Can you tell me why not?"

"It's just that I almost never go out."

"But why? At your age you ought to go out and have a good time. You're risking your future for nothing. Why don't you go out more?"

"My mother is all by herself. I have to keep her company."

"That's no reason. I'm sure if she realized how important it is for you to be sociable, she wouldn't care if she had to sit at home alone a couple of nights a month. That's all it would have to be. I'm telling you this as a friend and a man of experience."

"Well, the truth is, I'm very lazy. I love sleeping. I'd rather sleep than go out."

"Don't tell me you spend Saturdays and Sundays asleep!"

"I know it sounds odd, but I do. I am a very sleepy person."

Aquiles' face suddenly contorted with laughter and he raised his napkin to his mouth to keep from spewing food. "Did you hear, Sara? Did you hear what this fool said? The great Rengifo's chief amusement is sleeping. I never heard of such a thing. He doesn't go out, he doesn't drink, and he doesn't like women. It's like an addiction."

"Quite so," said Sebastián, giggling along with his boss's loud guffaws.

"I've heard of all sorts of vices—Don Juans, junkies, drunkards, and God knows what else—but I swear I never heard of anybody with an addiction for sleep. You're crazy, man! If you sleep all the time, life is going to slip away from you. You have to live, live, man! Look at me!"

Sebastián felt so uncomfortable and guilty that he had no choice but to attempt a vague explanation:

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"It's just that I think I'm going to discover something important in my dreams, something more important than...well, than living."

"What if it takes you your whole life to find out, and you die first? It means that you wasted your whole life sleeping and didn't get a thing out of it."

"I think what I'm going to find will be so marvelous that I'm prepared to take the risk."

"To risk waking up dead one fine day and having people throw you away, just like that, unused? Oh no, no, never. That's insane. You have to live."

The conversation began to lag. Just for something to say, Aquiles proposed: "I'll make you a bet you're going to die without seeing anything." Laughing, Sebastián replied: "Well, if I win, you pay for my funeral."

Aquiles didn't hesitate to accept.

"And if you win, what do you want?" Sebastián asked.

Aquiles slapped Sebastián on the shoulder and said: "If I win, I'll send you to a pauper's grave. How's that?"

"Fair enough."

They shook hands to seal the bargain.

"But how will we know who won?" asked Aquiles, beginning to have his doubts.

"I think when you see my face it will be enough. You'll know."

"You really are insane."

Both of them laughed. As he said good night to his protegé, Aquiles advised him: "It seems to me that what you need is more energy, vitality. Why don't you do exercises like me? I bought some weights and chest expanders, and every morning I do calisthenics. That way you might get enough energy to have fun and go out with women."

It was more or less the same idea his mother had timidly suggested in desperation at her son's refusal of any kind of amusement, even moviegoing.

Whenever she succeeded in persuading him to take her there, in the dark he would fall asleep instantly. Adela was aging rapidly, and every day her sight grew weaker. She had suffered so much! Her

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sufferings were her favorite topic of conversation with Mrs. Mechita, whose freckled fingers now lacked their former dexterity with crochet needles; but she showed an increasing interest in listening to other people's woes.

Once Adela told her son, as if Mrs. Mechita had said it, what she herself thought: "Mrs. Mechita, who loves you so much because she's known you almost since you were born, said it seems to her you're wasting your life, that you ought to have some fun, take a vacation this summer, for instance. She said you have to do something about this sleeping all the time. You're bewitched, she says, she believes in those things...."

Sebastián blew up. After screaming at her for a while, he lowered his voice and said: "What makes me most angry is that you tell me these things as if Mrs. Mechita had said them. Why don't you come out and tell me what you think? I don't want this to happen again, mama. I'm happy to work and support you, because I love you. But I will not allow anybody, not even you, to interfere with my life. It hurts me enough that I can't remember anything at all. No matter how hard I try, my happiness stays hidden behind the door when I wake up. Sometimes I think I ought to drop everything, risk starving to death if necessary, to have time to sleep on and on and on—until the door opens. I'm afraid life is too short. So if I don't have the right to sleep in my time off from work, then it's not worth it to me to go on living."

"Your life isn't worth living, doing what you do!" Adela answered, and left the room, slamming the door behind her. She locked herself in but wailed very loud so that Sebastián couldn't help hearing her.

Sebastián reflected that trying to explain things to his mother was useless. It was useless to explain anything to anybody. All this was bigger than himself or other people. He was being dragged toward an unknown end with such force that it uprooted him, and, isolating him, made it impossible for him to communicate with others. That he could not remember his happiness caused him increasing anguish. Before, when he was a child, he would sleep just for fun, like someone who had found a slightly mysterious toy, but still a toy and therefore harmless. In those days, he slept because he enjoyed it, or when he had time, or simply when he felt like it.

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But now that he was paying his debt to society by supporting his mother and taking some part in the activities of living beings, he felt he had every right to do his sleeping seriously, in full knowledge of his goal, dragged along by the genuine and increasingly urgent need to know what his dreams contained. What had been a pastime was now his reason for existing, and he dedicated all his leisure time to it, possessed by a driving thirst for sleep, like a person who exposes himself to losing something more important than life itself if he does not make good use of every hour. But when he woke up, the door remained sealed, leaving him bedazzled and drained, desperate to remember the thing that would explain every thing, and at the same time remain in contact with people.

From so much caviling and ruminating on her bad luck in life and the meager satisfaction that her son's incomprehensible destiny had given her, Adela was growing pale and thin, sad and lonely in the depths of her boarding-house room. It finally dawned on her that she meant nothing to Sebastián, she was another object owed vague affection in the kingdom of objects. It was as if by ignoring her he had erased her from life, depriving her of shape and weight. Adela was deaf and nearly blind, and her legs pained her greatly when she walked. She coughed all the time. One day she coughed too much, and because she didn't have the strength to call for help, she died, as though she had finally convinced herself of her own lack of existence.

Coming back from the funeral, Sebastián removed his hat and gloves, dropping them on the marble-topped dressing table. He closed the shutters, asked Mrs. Mechita to send him food twice a day, and lay down to sleep, eagerly, as if his mother's death had untied the last bond that fastened him to the world. He slept for three days and three nights, the time off for mourning Marambio had given him with a sympathetic look. When he woke up he knew the door was still closed, still hiding the light. But there was a marvelous difference: now he was absolutely certain that one day, even if far in the future, he would be able to remember that whole part of his life hidden behind the dream door. All he needed was to set about it, nothing more. This new faith made him get dressed, comb his hair, and leave for the office, feeling more lighthearted than ever before, strong and sure of himself. He had the secretary

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tell Marambio he wanted to see him. Marambio received him with a brotherly hug and offered him the most comfortable chair in the office.

Sebastián refused the cigarette Aquiles offered him and said: "I've come to hand in my resignation."

Aquiles Marambio leaped to his feet. He could not understand this sudden decision. Why? What for? How would he support himself? Didn't he realize that if he stayed in the organization he had a great future? How could he be so irresponsible? But Sebastián was firm in his resolve. He couldn't see or hear Aquiles.

At last, tired of arguing with himself, Marambio looked at Sebastián and asked insultingly: "And what do you plan to do with your life? Sleep all the time?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

Marambio was trying to control his temper.

"I don't know, I have to, I must find out—"

Marambio lost control and began to yell. "Don't give me that crap about your visions. The truth is, you're a lazy slob, like the rest of you who think you're so special! What gives you the right to a privileged life? Now don't hand me that crap. What you want is to have a good time, doing no work, just sleeping and relaxing. Visions my ass! I warn you, you're going to die and you'll never see a goddamn thing. Okay, get out. Oh, one more thing—just so you remember—don't come to me begging for help. Our friendship is over right now. I'm no friend of professional bums. If you want to take it easy and have a good time, you'll have to take the consequences all the way."

Sebastián was hurt, but gazed at him serenely. "What about our bet?" he asked.

Aquiles laughed contemptuously. "So you have the nerve to keep up the joke, even now? Okay, that bet stands, and it's the only thing between us. But you don't know what a kick I'm going to have watching them dump you in a pauper's grave."

Out on the street, Sebastián breathed deeply. Now, at last, he was his own master; no strings bound him to anybody or anything, and each second would bring him closer and closer to opening the door. What difference did it make that people considered him

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useless? What was he but a poor clerk who worked for an import company and lived in a boarding house that smelled of moth-eaten curtains? The dream, on the other hand, although he couldn't remember it yet, would give him a whole rainbow of clarity with which he, Sebastián Rengifo, would be able to drive the edge of darkness back. Yes, now he was sure. What he had given a few spare moments to before would be the vocation of his entire life. He would live in such a way as to sleep as many hours as possible, and would not permit any obligations of real life to interfere. He no longer had any reason to care about things that to him had never been more than shadows: food, clothing, entertainment, people. This way, living near the door constantly, he would be ready, whenever the light shone through.

The only way to achieve this was to strip himself of everything. And, since he had never liked the city, especially now with the approach of spring, he sold his furniture and got rid of all his belongings. He said goodbye forever to Mrs. Mechita, and she, choking on her tears, exclaimed: "Son, you are crazy, you are crazy!"

Then he left the city by a road that led north.

The landscape took him in immediately, easing his vigil with a dreamy breeze. The willows rocked their manes beside slow, dark streams, and the same wind that tangled their sad locks gave a different vocabulary to each plant, branch, leaf. Over there, a hill blue with tender eucalyptus trees. The paths of rich brown earth, where poor children played with innumerable dogs, carried him toward an inn that announced itself from afar with delicious aromas, or toward a plume of smoke that waved to him from the roof of a cottage half hidden in the trees. The bark of every tree displayed a map of a different age and function. Sebastián, in the midst of all this, felt that the distance which before had separated daily reality from the other reality, the more real reality, was shrinking. To him all this rich external world was becoming one with the hidden reality of his dream.

Sebastián, young and strong and happy as the summer began, went along working a while here and a while there, on the farms and in the fields. One place, he helped wash the sheep and was allowed to sleep on the porch. Then he worked in the sunflower

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harvest and after that he got a job digging potatoes out of the black soil. Then he went on his way while the thrushes hurtled around like stones, menacing the delicate blue of the sky. The money he earned with three days' work allowed him to do nothing for a week; and he spent the whole time sleeping under the peach trees laden with fruit, or in open fields, or in haystacks. The sun tanned his face and arms. A serene light bathed his eyes. When he occasionally went back to the city, he would see Aquiles Marambio from a distance, and at the sight of Sebastián he would turn away or rapidly cross the street to avoid having to talk to him, raising a gloved finger from afar as if to scold him or remind him.

Little by little something strange was happening to Sebastián: he couldn't control his sleep. Now he couldn't just start in sleeping of his own free will as in the past. Sleep would overpower his will, acquiring an independence that ruled him despotically. Now, suddenly, sleep would take over for no obvious reason, on the side of a road for example, and he would have to curl up right there, among the dirty weeds, to sleep. Uneasy, he sensed that sleep was overflowing its place and flooding his entire life. He would succumb anywhere, by day or by night, in cold or warm weather, under the rain or during working hours, and when he woke up his desperation grew when he realized he still couldn't remember. But as he slept more and more, he felt more and more tormented by knowing he was excluded from his own happiness; and yet he felt more and more confident that he would see the door open wide to receive him. A great nearness was what he remembered on awakening. But nothing more.

One day they gave him a scythe, promising him that if he mowed all the hay in a pasture and stored it in the silo, they would pay him a tidy sum of money—enough, Sebastián thought, to allow him to sleep a whole month without worrying about anything, and a whole month of sleep was a fantastic prospect. His chest bare, his scythe over his shoulder, he waded across the pasture from one end to the other. The tops of the fig trees were liquid and murmured in the breeze that had just picked up, and in their thick blue shadows, on the moss, two ducks were resting like recently washed shirts which the wind had softly left fall. Sebastián heard the herons cry out, and, looking up at the heavy clouds moving swiftly over the

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fingers of the poplars, he said: "I'd better hurry. The hay has to be mown and stored fast, because there's going to be a storm tonight."

He worked all afternoon. The clouds lowered darkly. Sebastián mowed like a man driven to save himself in a sea of vegetation. When all the hay was mown, he knew he was defeated. He looked up at the sky. The rain was already falling. In a moment sleep would overcome him. And he fell asleep on the newly mown hay, the rain falling on his body and on the crop, the harvested hay that would rot. When he woke up, his bosses, furious that he had let the hay spoil, refused to pay him. Sebastián left, walking for days on end, because the news that he wasn't reliable was spreading from farm to farm.

It became difficult to get work. Everywhere he was given a job, however easy, the same thing happened. He would fall asleep uncontrollably. They would leave him to watch a pot, and the stew would scorch. They would ask him to babysit, and the child would fall out of its cradle. They would send him over for a cartload of hay, and at first he would goad the oxen in the right direction, but soon he would doze off and the cart would go astray. The mark of failure engraved itself on his manner and his voice and his ragged clothes.

"I'm getting old," he thought.

It would have been easy enough to let himself die, throw himself in front of a truck on the highway, or jump off a bridge. But Sebastián didn't want to die, because he could only go on dreaming if he were alive. He felt he was very near the end, but he was tired. The worst thing was that to keep alive he had to work and nobody wanted to give him a job. People would avoid him as if they were afraid of him or thought he brought bad luck. Desperate, one afternoon he went to a psychiatric clinic to beg them to show him how to control his sleep. He was taken care of by two serious, kind young doctors, dressed like angels in white. They patiently listened to Sebastián's story.

"Yes," said one of them, "But this isn't an illness."

"We can't treat you here," the other added, a bit sadly.

"But I'm afraid I'll die, doctors," pleaded Sebastián.

"If you spend the whole day asleep, isn't it the same as being dead?"

"No, no, I'm so near, doctor. The door is just about to open."

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"The door? What door?"

Then the doctors decided that Sebastián was one of those slightly unbalanced people who weren't crazy enough to warrant intensive treatment. There were too many truly ill people, and the clinic had to be reserved for them. But they sensed a kind of defenselessness in Sebastián: he had nowhere to go, and was terrified of dying before the door opened. The doctors felt sorry for him and let him stay in the clinic a few days. But one night, making their rounds together, they came to Sebastián's bed and, seeing his smile, the bliss that lighted his face, decided it was impossible to keep in their clinic anybody who slept so peacefully. They sent him away the next morning.

Sebastián knew the end was near. He no longer had any work to do and wandered through the streets and roads, begging from house to house and from farm to farm. Nothing around him mattered. He lived in a twilight world, peopled by shadows, echoes, and waiting. He let his hair and beard grow long. Weakness invaded him and he would walk along roads, railroad tracks, streets and avenues in the city and when sleep touched him he lay down anywhere. Once a horse sniffed his face thinking he was dead. People ran away from him as though he were a warlock or a pervert or a madman. But he went on sleeping, confident that when the door opened all those people who had run away from him would understand.

Sometimes he went into the city, because it was easier to get food there. At the market he could steal bread or a bit of fried fish. But often they recognized him, and a woman staggering under the weight of her packages would confront him and shout: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you lazy bum? Instead of working, you beg and steal. You are disgusting. They ought to throw you out of town or put you in jail. You're not so old that you can't work."

But he couldn't work. Sleep would overcome him at once, as if indignant at any attempt to separate him from its power. Once they caught him stealing and took him to jail. They soon let him go, but the word got out that he was a criminal, and the people who used to smile kindly at his venial sin of laziness now crossed the street when they saw him coming.

Winter arrived, another winter, and this one brought Sebas-

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tián the certainty he was going to die. He had no strength left. But he thought if he could live a few weeks longer, if he could find something to eat and a place to stay, he would be able to sleep, to remember at last, and he would tell about it. To die before then would be failure. But Sebastián's hope was strong, the only thing in him that did not waver.

It was very cold. At dawn, under the dead black trees of the park, Sebastián sometimes found birds that had died of the cold. Trying to revive them, he would blow on their gray feathers that, hardened by frost, did not move. In the city he lived under a bridge, and by surrounding himself with flea-ridden mongrels to keep warm and covering himself with old newspapers to keep off the wind, he was able to sleep a great deal, almost all the time. He knew he was on the verge of remembering, that the door was about to open. It was just a question of clinging to life a few days longer, finding a crust of bread, protecting himself against the ice and frost. It was hard. Sometimes he would press his nose against a butcher's window and stand watching the hot red of the disemboweled animals hanging from hooks, and whenever anybody opened the door, the thick, bloody smell soothed his hunger and cold a little.

One day he was struck by an idea.

He would visit Aquiles Marambio, who lived nearby. Perhaps he would take pity on him. Perhaps, forgetting what he had said so many years before, he would give Sebastián food and shelter for a few days, though the last time their paths had crossed Marambio hadn't even recognized him. But perhaps...

Sebastián made a cap out of newspapers to protect his head, and slowly moved through the cold afternoon, crossing streets—and shadows of houses and trees and unlighted street lamps—from time to time glancing up at the leaden sky striped with electricity wires, until he reached Marambio's house. The clouds drained the red sunset on to the roofs. Sebastián pressed the doorbell. A maid dressed in black with a white muslin apron opened the door.

"Could I have a word with Aquiles Marambio?" Sebastián said.

"With Don Aquiles?" The maid stressed the "Don." "They're at dinner. Go around to the back door, through the alley. This door is for visitors. Who shall I say is asking for him?"

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Pronouncing his name, Sebastián Rengifo, was like opening the door of a bird cage, letting his name fly away forever. He waited beside the back door, in an alley where the trapped wind was howling. Sebastián pulled his triangular paper hat down farther and tied the old rags covering his feet tighter. Without a face now, without a name, he sat in the doorway to wait.

At last the door opened. Aquiles Marambio, who had grown fat over the years, had a white napkin knotted under his double chin.

"Did you wish to speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes....Don't you remember me?"

Marambio wiped his glasses with a corner of the napkin. Behind him, in the part of the room revealed by the door, some people were laughing at a table laden with food.

"I can't remember. Hurry up and tell me what you want. It's damn cold and the flu is going around."

He waited. Then Marambio threatened: "If you don't tell me what you want, I am going to close the door."

"You don't recognize me," Sebastián stammered.

"No, I do not recognize you. How am I supposed to know all the bums in this city? Besides, under that beard and filth..."

"I came to ask you to give me food and a place to live for a few days, sir. I'm going to die but I can't before I see the door open...please..."

A cloud of recognition darkened Marambio's face.

"Until what? What door?"

"...the door and I can see..."

"No, no, no. Go away. You aren't going to die. You are not too old to find work. You wanted to be what you are. Go away. Good night. I won't have anything to do with you." And he closed the door.

Sebastián curled up as best he could to sleep in the doorway.

During the night the sky cleared and the stars, barely twinkling, looked down sharply from the fearsome black depth of the sky, which let a hard frost fall on the earth. The next morning, Sunday, the sky was fragile and thin, like an immense blue paper kite. The sun didn't warm up the streets but its clear light revealed all the edges and contours of things.

Don Aquiles Marambio, his wife, and his two little daughters, six and seven years old, went to Mass early. They took communion

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and walked home slowly down the sunny lanes, greeting acquaintances, stopping at times to stamp their feet and clap their hands to drive the numbness from their fingers. A few steps ahead, María Patricia and María Isabel, almost the same size, wearing identical white fur hats and matching muffs, were proud to let the passersby admire their erect posture and their elegant clothes.

They entered the alleyway that led to the back door of their house, and suddenly the feathers of steam floating serenely out of the four Marambio mouths were cut off. Aquiles and his wife stopped dead. The girls screamed and ran to their parents' legs for protection. Right there, in their own doorway, a hairy, dirty human shape was curled up, covered by dank newspapers. They carefully moved closer. Marambio poked the shape with his toe.

"He's dead," he murmured.

The woman leaned over to remove the hat that hid his face. Marambio exclaimed: "Don't be an idiot. Leave him that way. Why do you want to see his face?"

But the woman had already done it, and the dead man's face, under the beard and filth, was transfixed by such an expression of joy that María Patricia, approaching him without fear, exclaimed: "Look, Daddy, look how pretty. He seems to be seeing..."

"Shut up, don't talk nonsense," Marambio snapped furiously.

"It looks as if he is watching..."

Before María Isabel could say what it looked as if the dead man was watching, Marambio yanked his two daughters away and pushed them into the house. They held hands and obeyed without their usual pouts and sniffles when their father thwarted them, and commented to each other how pretty dead people were, promising they would never again listen to grownups, who were so afraid of the dead. Marambio called the police to tell them there was a dead tramp at the back door. And because Don Aquiles was a wealthy man with a sense of civic duty, he said that since the man had died on his doorstep, they weren't to dump the body in a pauper's grave. He would pay for the funeral, not a first-class one of course—that would be absurd—but a decent third-class one, which was probably a luxury the nameless tramp would never have expected.

Translated by Andrée Conrad

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THE NEW LATIN AMERICAN NOVELISTS

Emir Rodríguez Monegal

Nothing is more difficult than trying to establish an acceptable canon for the new Latin American novelists. To the arbitrary political considerations which contaminate all serious discussion of the new Latin American literature, one must add the particular problem of access to the works themselves and to the basic literary criticism which attempts to place them in a precise context. How many novels still await, in those centuries where bibliography is in a poor or erratic state (as in many Central American countries, or the less privileged centers of South America), the reader with enough imagination to rescue them from the nondescript mass of works surrounding them? How many known writers have received the kind of critical recognition which helps not only to distinguish but to place them in a more general and recognizable trend? How many (even those most publicized, such as Carlos Fuentes, Cortázar, Carpentier) have really been the object of an analysis which goes beyond a lineal reading or mere glossing over? These problems, and others which I have no space to discuss now, explain why it is still impossible to establish an acceptable canon. The most one can hope to achieve at this stage, in order to indicate possible ways of reading the new novelists, is to define some basic critical lines, and to illustrate them with some relevant examples.

It is important to stress, above all, that many of the newest and most experimental Latin American novelists are not in the strict sense, new (the most outstanding case here is Macedonio Fernández); they are also not really experimental (García Marquez, for example, who is above all a traditional narrator). For that very reason, the criterion of a novelty must be based on a recognition of the main current in the new novel. From this point of view, and considering the vast experimentation which has occurred in the European and North American novel, from the first world war

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on, it seems evident that the main current can be located in what has been called the novel about language.

One needn't go further than avant-garde narrative, with Joyce's *Ulysses* as the fundamental piece, to recognize that this book (published in early 1922) initiates a new style for the novel. *Ulysses* obviously expands the external structure of the narrative, creating a linear narration which is both a parody of the *Odyssey* and an allegorical voyage in which the protagonist experiences a double descent into the inferno of a city (symbolized in the visit of the brothel) and into the mystery of sex (Molly Bloom's monologue), to find his lost identity as a son in the recognition of his father and the embrace of his mother. Not only does *Ulysses* create this narrative structure which duplicates the model in its mythical signification, but it also creates a linguistic structure in which the model appears transposed into the code of a narrative language which also brings about the double descent and achieves the double recognition. This second level is not of the Homeric model but of certain literary monuments of the English language. Joyce's achievement was to be imitated in many languages. Slowly, and through many successful works (Borges achieved in his short stories a scale reduction of that double process) and through some literally monstrous attempts (Leopoldo Marechal's *Adan Buenosayres), Ulysses* became the invisible but central model of the new Latin American narrative. From this point of view, Cortazar's *Hopscotch,* Lezama Lima's *Paradiso,* Fuentes's *Change of Skin,* and Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers,* are Joycean books. Whether or not they are obviously Joycean, they do share the same secret code. That is, they all agree in conceiving of the novel as both a parody and a myth, a structure which in its *topoi,* as much as in its private symbols, reveals the unity of a complete system of signification.

Narrative language, then, comes to the foreground to define the system of each book. We are no longer dealing here, as was believed in the modernist era, with the preeminence of language as decoration, language as a means to an end that was (finally) alien to it. Here decoration is inseparable from the object decorated, here there is only adornment. The customary distinctions between the surface and the depth of a given text, the discussion of meaning as something alien to the narrative structure itself, and the whole polemic over committed literature acquire a different sense. There is no profundity other than that of the surface of the text, no meanings but rather signification, nothing that is not the commitment of the text to itself.

Which doesn't mean that each book is not inserted into a certain historical circumstance or cannot be read within a certain political con-

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text. Each novel is susceptible to a reading which demands and finds meanings, which postulates and recognizes commitment. This is possible as long as one admits that upon bringing about such an operaton, one is extrapolating from the work to make it function within another system, alien (by definition) to the literary system to which the work properly belongs. Thus, for example, we can use any bulky dictionary to straighten out an uneven table. This does not mean that its principal function is that.

The novel about language, then, constitutes the main trend from which it is possible to establish a certain canon of the new novelists. From this critical angle, some important narrators (like Graciliano Ramos, Carpentier, Sábato, Arguedas, García Márquez) have less validity than others (like Lezama Lima, Cortázar, Cabrera Infante) in which the creation of a linguistic model, complete and coherent in all its dimensions, is more evident. This initial perspective may serve as a starting point to examine the new novel.

If the forties initiated, in so many different ways, the new Latin American novel, it is evident that the following decade produced two of the books which have most influenced the course of that narrative. They were published a year apart; I am referring, of course, to Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), and to *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* (1956), by João Guimaraes Rosa. What Rulfo's novel meant for the new Latin American writing, is what (though perhaps more massively) Guimaraes Rosa's novel was for Brazil's literature.

At this stage of the critical bibliography on Rulfo, it is not necessary to discuss at length his only and great novel. The critics have already recognized its double value as a document of a certain hidden zone of Mexican reality and as a narrative experiment of great importance. What has been less obvious to them, especially at first, is what Octavio Paz pointed out in a brilliant commentary: its mythical design, its quest for the roots of Mexican solitude. That journey of the main narrator through the inferno of Comala in search of a lost father parallels, in another dimension of the story, the search of Pedro Páramo for his assaulted identity, and the quest for identity of Mexico itself. Here lie the mythical roots of this hallucinated book. But already in Rulfo, as in the major novelists who follow him, the mythical structure of the search and the narrative structure in which that search is told are the same thing. On the level of language—that dialogue of the dead who rehearse a dead reality, totally embalmed by the incommunication that afflicted them when alive—the central conflict of the book is made explicit. The separation between form and content, once accepted by the critics, is now irrelevant.

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To read Rulfo, to decode him, one must begin by facing the enigma proposed by the linguistic code of his novel.

The case of Guimaraes Rosa is even more extraordinary. While Rulfo compresses, with majestic economy, the destiny of Pedro Páramo in a relatively brief though complex structure, Guimaraes Rosa expands over the loose plot of an immense monologue the narration of a destiny that is also allegorical. If Rulfo uses the dialogue of the dead, with its parallel lamentations, its evocations, its secret allegories, to stress the final incommunication in which his protagonists are frozen, Guimaraes Rosa uses and abuses the protagonist's monologue to a silent listener, to postulate that final lack of communication.

In a manner more Joycean than Faulknerian (the North American writer is a recognized influence on Rulfo), Guimaraes Rosa situates the first level of access to his novel in even more demanding circumstances than Rulfo's. While in Rulfo all is transparent at the level of language, in Rosa, the narrative line is simple and can be told in a few words, but the language is opaque, almost inaccessible, even for the Brazilians themselves. Because Rosa here has followed more the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake* than that of *Ulysses*. The protagonist, Riobaldo, takes advantage of the idiosyncracies of the oral monologue, its loose grammatical structure, its idioms and barbarisms, to pour into a language which is, on the other hand, strongly regionalist, that endless thread of evocation of his adolescence and first youth, of the search for his identity through the search for a father and of a love which cannot be accepted because it is condemned by the machistic code of a warrior's sword.

A very Rulfian theme, of couse, because it is one of the great *topoi* of all literature. But a theme which Rosa develops in a more explicitly religious way than Rulfo. The center of the protagonist's moral conflict appears allegorized by a diabolic temptation and by the encounter with a disembodied voice which tempts him in the desert. That seduction and the other diabolical temptation which is the love for Diadorim, one of his comrades-in-arms, will allow Rosa the minimal plot required by the novel. But in his work, as in Rulfo's, it is not the adventure that centers or monopolizes its interest but rather the mythical design which that adventure reveals. Again, the linguistic structure built by the narrative to bring to fruition the search for a new language for the Brazilian novel, and the mythical structure which makes the other search explicit, are inseparable, like the two sides of a glove.

From Rulfo, the new Latin American novel branches out: one line follows the exploration of those national realities, going deeper into circumstances (as in the early novels of Fuentes, García Márquez, and

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Vargas Llosa); another uses not only Rulfo's experiment but also the previous experiments of Asturias and Borges, to seek out the mythical level (Cortazar, the Donoso of *The Obscene Bird of Night,* the later Fuentes, especially that of *Terra Nostra,* the Vargas Llosa of *Conversation in the Cathedral*). But there is a third line that, up to a certain point, takes advantage of both to stress that narrative of language which continues, amplifies, and even goes beyond the experiment in *Pedro Páramo.* That is the line to be clarified now.

A last observation before moving ahead. Brazilian letters, since the appearance of *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands,* has not experienced a renewal comparable to that of the new Spanish American novel. This does not mean that there aren't new writers, some very distinguished ones like Clarice Lispector, Nelida Pinon and Dalton Trevisan, to mention only a few. There are outstanding novels like *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), by Clarice Lispector, in which she explores with great stylistic rigor an extreme case of paranoia, and in which the same arid violence of the language turns the work into a perfect model of the new novel. There is also Nelida Pinon's novel, *The House of Passion* (1972), where the intensity and exasperation of the language opens the way to very secret erogenous zones. But even in these two outstanding examples, the new Brazilian narrative after Rosa seems more timid, less daring than the Spanish American one. Which is the one we will now consider.

That main current of the novel about language finds its most experimental expression in the work of three Cuban writers (Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy, Reynaldo Arenas) and a fourth, the Argentine writer, Manuel Puig. That Cuba has such preeminence today in Spanish American narrative can be explained not only by the international impact of that country's cultural politics, especially in the early years of the revolution, but also because even before Castro Cuban literature was highly experimental, as exemplified by the work of Lezama Lima. This writer, with his own Baroque poetry and prose, and with the influence of his literary magazines (especially *Orígenes*), had helped to locate the quest for a truly American expressivity on the most experimental level of myth and of language. But one should keep in mind, as well, the influence of pop culture, which in Cuba (before other Latin American countries and simultaneously with England, Italy, and France) had begun to produce curious and original mutations. The proximity of the United States, the long North American control over the island, which from a political point of view had tragic consequences, paradoxically became from a cultural point of view a source of challenge and creativity.

The pop culture, which came out of the fifties and developed rapidly

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on both sides of the Atlantic from the sixties on (not only are the Rolling Stones pop, but also the didactic arch-revolutionary Swiss-born Jean Luc Godard), was a central part of Cuban culture long before it was imported to the rest of Latin America. With the exception perhaps of Mexico, pop was introduced in Latin America through the mediation of English, Italian, or French artists and writers. Dependent on Europe for even the most aggressive manifestations of independence, Latin America discovered pop in the New Wave films or in the movies produced by Fellini and Antonioni. It was the Beatles, and not the Elvis Presley of the fifties, who revealed to Latin Americans the mysteries of rock. They adored Samuel Fuller and revered Budd Boetticher thanks to the embalming retrospectives of the European cinemathèques. Not in Cuba. There the influence of the North American pop culture of the fifties was so great that the Revolution had barely exploded when two young writers were more than ready to translate that culture into Cuban. The first (not only chronologically) was Guillermo Cabrera Infante.

The day when his already considerable narrative and critical work will be studied without the limitations imposed by political inquisition, something that is already obvious for his best readers today will be discovered: that *Three Trapped Tigers,* instead of being a one-shot affair, is actually the third version of a work Cabrera Infante had begun to write in the early fifties, and which came to exist through the intermediate stages of a volume of stories—*Así en la paz como en la guerra* (In Peace as in War, 1960)—and a collection of movie chronicles—*Un oficio del siglo XX* (A Twentieth Century Job, 1963). In the first book, the stories and vignettes (the latter about the anti-Batista underground) make up a sequence of episodes which are similar, although more geometric, to the narrative part of *TTT*. In the second book, the movie chronicles are attributed to a pseudonymous writer, "G. Cain," and include a biography by his friend, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, which mirrors the relationship Bustrofedon had with the text and characters of *TTT*. In both books one already finds the expression of that pop culture which in the sixties would give birth to the counter-culture. That is, they share the very same predilection for North American commercial movies and popular music, the same ironic, even satirical evaluation of the official culture of this century, the same telegraphic language of movie subtitles and comic strips alternating with the prose and poetry of the anthologies, and, above all, the same deliberately bastard mixture of Cuban Spanish with spoken English: that *Spanglish* which the purists reject with the same De Gaullist fervor with which Etiemble once denounced *Franglais*.

From the trials and errors of those two books comes the vision and

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language of *Three Trapped Tigers,* a work deeply lived by the author and his characters, and a book whose language reveals the emotional center from which it was conceived. The concept of translation that informs the whole book is also valid for its pop vision. Because if there is something that marks deeply the pop vision of the world it is precisely the concept of translation. The pop artist transfers to his work the raw materials of today, the language of the tribe, making a sort of translation which allows (like a palimpsest) the recognition beneath the given text, of the subtext, or intertext, of the original language. A book centered on that concept of translation, structured freely around a collage of Havana voices, *Three Trapped Tigers* is an open work, in the sense that Umberto Eco gives to the expression. This not only situates it in the tradition of *Ulysses* but in the more remote tradition of the *Satyricon,* one of Cabrera Infante's models. Like the Latin work, *TTT* attempts to gather up the light of a society at the point of extinction and does it by means of a collection of fragments whose secret unity can only be found between the lines of the text. Its text continues to mislead the best professional readers, as John Updike's review in *The New Yorker* (Jan. 29, 1972) proved. That another writer could be not only so wrong about the value of the book but also so confused as to take one character for another, to miss its hidden plot, etc., etc., is excellent proof that the linguistic structure created by Cabrera Infante does not only function on the literal level of his puns, palindromes, parodies, and other cryptographic amenities. It also renovates the art of reading.

Another central aspect of pop culture appears reflected in the work of Severo Sarduy. With three novels published to date—*Gestos* (Gesture, 1962), *From Cuba With a Song* (1967), *Cobra* (1972)—Sarduy has searched for and found a synthesis of cultures which in some way reflect the Cuban experience and his own. If on one level his work appears to comment somewhat obsessively on the most recent structuralist trend (Sarduy has lived in France since 1960; like Cortázar, he is also a French citizen); if his links with Francois Wahl, Roland Barthes and the *Tel Quel* group are well known, the roots of Sarduy the writer can be found in Lezama Lima's poetic renovation realized in *Orígenes* as well as in the Cuban master's own works. Upon these Baroque poetics (which *From Cuba With a Song* illustrates with the long linguistic voyage of its third part), Sarduy sets out on an investigation of the sources of present-day Cuban culture, which he metaphorizes in the encounter of Chinese, African, and Hispanic contributions. Already in *Corbra,* the vision is internationalized, thus becoming pop. The parodic collage of William Burroughs, the *Drugstore* of Saint-Germain-des-Près, the transvestism of Place Pigalle and the tantric

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Buddhism (via Octavio Paz), which is achieved in this brilliant novel, appear under the sign of pop art. The linguistic conception, the rigor of the code, the precision of the signs, come, naturally, from structuralism but the mixture and juxtaposition of elements, the syncretism of cultures, the humor, are pop. The parody of a style which already is parody (Lichtenstein transcribing to another code the language of the comic strips, which in turn are transcriptions of another code); the carnivalesque application of some theories which the French critics have carried to ridiculous heights of solemnity; the surrealistic and at the same time popular humor with which Sarduy undertakes his demystification against centuries of Louvre and Sorbonne and Collège de France, links his joyous and desperate enterprise with Cabrera Infante's.

It is true that the latter's iconography and system of references are more accessible: the pop culture of the movies constitutes a kind of *lingua franca,* a *koiné* of this century, which all of us speak (well or poorly). Sarduy's narrative language is less accessible. Therefore his work continues being secret, although I think *Cobra* is possibly the more accessible. Even so, Sarduy is writing for future readers and most probably his work will continue being looked at with mistrust by those who believe literature should call a spade a spade—as if that noble saying (as if literature itself) were not, inevitably, metaphoric. Sarduy's essays, on the other hand, so far collected in *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* (Writing on a Body, 1969), are among the few in Spanish which have seriously applied structuralism to the critical evaluation of Latin American literature. (Another decisive exception is Octavio Paz.) The day when Sarduy's critics are as prepared as the author to discuss the principles on which his work is based, it will be easier to recognize what is already evident for some: that he is one of the masters of the new narrative.

A venture similar to Sarduy's, though undertaken without Sarduy's poetic rigor, is the one attempted by Reynaldo Arenas. In at least two novels—*Celestino ante el alba* (Celestino Before Dawn, 1966); *Hallucinations* (1969)— Arenas has evolved from the chaotic Faulknerian stream-of-consciousness of his first work to the more complex and experimental narrative of the second. Based on the *Memorias* (Memoirs) of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, this novel not only retells the true life of the nineteenth-century revolutionary Mexican priest, his adventures and imprisonments, but especially recaptures his imaginary life. Along the line initiated by Marcel Schwob in his *Vies imaginaires* (1896), also illustrated by Virginia Woolf in her *Orlando* (1928), and Borges's "biographies" in *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935), Reynaldo Arenas moves swiftly through the different dimensions of Fray Servando's life, sometimes quoting his exact

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words of inventing monologues and erotic adventures (which the original *Memorias* skips over), and ends up building a verbal structure of evident virtuosity. The original text of the *Memorias* is one of the layers of an archeological excavation which Arenas produces to reach (at the center of the book in an allegorical scene allusive to the *topos* of the hero's descent to hell) that last layer in which the complex and polemical Fray Servando finally reveals himself. But it is not only the text of the *Memorias* that is played against Arenas's text: the latter splits into different versions, often of the same episode, jumping from the third person to the second, or first, to refract Fray Servando's hallucinating experience in the prism of language. A comical and parodic book (like Cabrera Infante's and Sarduy's), *Hallucinations* has still to be published in Cuba. Its banishment, as far as one can conjecture, is probably not so much the result of the explosive nature of its defense of individual freedom, as it is of the vitality of its erotic scenes, which do not avoid a frank presentation of homosexuality, and its parodies of some idols of the Establishment. (There is a joke on Carpentier's nominative style which recalls the more lethal parody in Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers*).

In Cabrera Infante, Sarduy, and Arenas, we see how a form of parody occupies, by means of linguistic experimentation and the use of the codes of pop culture, the center of the new narrative. In other countries similar experiments have been attempted. Thus, in Mexico, writers like Gustavo Sainz and José Agustin have also exploited some areas of pop: the world of the adolescents in Mexico City in the first (especially in his amazing *Gazapo,* 1965), with all the paraphernalia of a culture which they consume somewhat literally; the more provincial world which Agustin reflects in *De perfil* (In Profile, 1968) and in his stories, but which saves through humor the iconography of pop art. But it is above all in Argentina where, in the wake of Manuel Puig's work, some valid explorations of that Hispano-American counter-culture have appeared.

Puig's work, his visible work, consists now of three published novels (*Betrayed by Rita Hayworth,* 1968, *Heartbreak Tango,* 1969, and *The Buenos Aires Affair,* 1973). The first two constitute a parody, the first implicit, the second explicit, of the devices of the dime novel. By dime novel, Puig understands not only the serial structure of some narrative works of the nineteenth century (Dickens, Wilkie Collins) but also its present forms: the radio or television soap opera, the sentimental movie, the comic strips, and (especially) that other serial literature which is capsuled in tango and bolero lyrics. With those raw materials of pop art Puig composes linguistic structures which rest principally on the spoken language of the characters, presented directly by the author, almost without any

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words enunciated by the author. There is more omniscient description in *Heartbreak Tango,* and even more in *The Buenos Aires Affair* which parodies the detective novel, but it is limited by a reticent discourse—in which Puig mocks the pseudo-objectivity of the third-person narrator. In *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* only the ordering of the chapters, and their informative titles reveal the hand of the author.

With that bastard material, parodic already in the originals which he parodies, Puig writes novels in which he saves for literature a scorned genre, and introduces into the field of the literary reader's experience, a whole dimension of Latin American reality which so far had been confined to the purgatory of subliterature or which had been the object of only ironic attention on the part of refined writers. If we compare, for example, what Borges and Bioy Casares do, or what Marechal and Cortázar do (the latter especially in *The Winners*), with what Puig does, we notice precisely in them that level of irony which is absent in Puig's work. Even though as a writer he is capable of judging his characters, as a parodist he situates himself on their same level and disguises his writing to follow the line of his originals. The result is a doubly efficient parody because the author doesn't cancel the reality of the material he treats through ironic distance, but at the same time captures its very style through empathy. To a certain point, and with another technique, Puig is carrying to its ultimate consequences an approximation of certain areas of the Argentine linguistic reality which had been attempted before, but with less luck, by Roberto Arlt in a series of badly written, tough, sour novels. Puig's successful integration of all levels of parody is worth noting. For the first time one feels that a writer of quality is speaking about a majority which had so far only found limited expression in the most commercial movies of Argentina, in certain radio programs, in the whining lyrics of the tango. But one must avoid thinking that those somewhat naive narrative structures presented by Puig are only the work of a primitive.

To understand exactly how unique his work is, one need only examine two of the most recent imitations which have been prompted by the success of his novels. One, *La ciudad de los sueños* (The City of Dreams, 1971), is the work of Juan José Hernández, a fine Argentine poet and story writer. There he follows the career of a provincial boy who goes to the capital, the city of his dreams, and who succeeds in triumphing in a sophisticated atmosphere to discover that his triumph is illusory. As a pessimistic transcription of what the sentimental novel does victoriously each season, this novel tries honestly to pull the same strings as those of Puig. But Hernández misses the hardness which lies beneath the frustration of so many dreams and which Puig so brilliantly brings about.

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Elegant where it should have been simply corny, sentimental where it should have been uncompromising, Hernández's novel only helps to reveal the virtues of its model. *La perinola* (The Spinning Top, 1971), by Mario Sexer, also uses the same narrative devices as Puig to picture the confined, oppressive atmosphere of an Argentine provincial city. But although Sexer has a pretty robust adolescent sense of humor, he lacks the power to bring about the other dimensions of that corny and frustrated reality. His parodies are cold; they don't have that anguish that is always present in the linguistic tissue of Puig's works.

With Puig's imitators we reach a truly epigonal stage of the new novel. The case of these two writers is not unique. Cortázar had already "liberated" more than one writer and had brought to life the very interesting variations of Nestor Sánchez in *Nosotros dos* (Us Two, 1966), *Siberia Blues* (1967), *El amor, los orsinis y la muerte* (Love, the Orsinis, and Death, 1969). In these works not only Cortázar's linguistic teachings but also the serial system of the new French novel and *nouvelle vague* movies were used to achieve effects which almost tear apart the narrative itself. But Sánchez seems to have entered, especially in his last book, a territory whose access is even more difficult than that of Sarduy's books. In and out of Colombia, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has unleashed a series of novels which harken back to America's novelesque past—like German Espinosa's *Los cortejos del diablo* (The Pageants of the Devil, 1970) — or which apply something of the epic-mythical vision of Garcia Marquez's book to Latin America's raw reality. Also tributaries of the great Colombian narrator are books like Tomás Eloy Martínez's *Sargrado* (Holy, 1969), or like *Redoble por Rancas* (Drumroll for Rancas, 1970), by Manuel Scorza. If the first uses the enormous repository of fables and superstitions of his native Tucumán to give, on several levels of reality, an epic vision of a famous Argentine medicine man, the second takes advantage of the narrative freedom which García Márquez had made possible to tell another episode (also real) of the fight for freedom in Perú. Of the many epigones of *One Hundred Years,* perhaps one of the most interesting is *País portátil* (Portable Country, 1968), by Adriano González León who uses a similar point of view to reconstruct in part the origins of a recent Venezuelan reality, deeply divided by guerrilla warfare. The urban world of the protagonist (narrated mainly through an interior monologue) contrasts with the hallucinated evocation of his rural origins. The extent to which García Márquez has introduced a new note in Hispano-American letters can be measured by his influence on a mature and already established raconteur such as Miguel Otero Silva, who in *Cuando quiero llorar, no lloro* (When I Want to Cry, I Don't, 1971), finds his true vein as an oral narrator and frees himself from

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the somewhat didactic realism of his latest works. Paradoxically that influence returns Otero Silva to his own narrative beginnings, the world which he had captured so poetically in *Casas muertas* (Dead Houses, 1955).

Enumerating all the books which, in some way, reflect the scope of the Latin American new novel would be an endless task. One would have to point out, for example, *Un mundo para Julius* (A World for Julius, 1970), by Alfredo Bryce Echenique, who takes off from the fiction written by his countryman and relative, Mario Vargas Llosa, and especially *Los cachorros* (The Puppies, 1966), to portray with exasperating moroseness and abuse of trivialities, that Hispano-American upper-middle-class which the Chilean José Donoso had already captured in his first novels. We should also talk about Fernando del Paso's *José Trigo* in which the overwhelming enterprise of creating a linguistic summa of today's Mexico ends up by sinking the book into trivality, despite the fact that some of the episodes (the war of the Cristeros, the labor union fight at the railroad station) have great distinction. We would have to talk about Augusto Roa Bastos and Carlos Droguett, Salvador Garmendia and Norberto Fuentes, René Marquez and Salvador Elizondo.

It is possible, though not completely certain, that the boom of Latin American narrative has died and that its last echoes have completely ceased. It is also almost certain that the new Latin American novel and (above all) the new Latin American literature is not only alive but also enjoys very good health. What we now need is to take advantage of the relative silence of publicity agencies to listen better. To read and reread, to look again at what we've seen, take distance, balance things out. That is, to occupy ourselves with what matters. Only then will we be able to decide if the sound and fury of the boom have left something more than a sensation of emptiness. Only then will we be able to rescue the literature of an entire continent from the irresponsible hands of propaganda, be it commercial, professional, or (as it is now fashionable to claim) "ideological." Let us begin the urgent task.

Translated by
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Ronald Christ

AN INTERVIEW WITH MANUEL PUIG

Christ: In each of your works, there is a kind of exterior form, an external skeleton, giving literary shape to the narrative. I'm thinking of the detective story format in *The Buenos Aires Affair,* of the *folletín* or serial in *Heartbreak Tango.*

Puig: Yes, I always start with an obsession, a subject that haunts me, that I need to develop. Such subjects are problems of my own that I can't deal with consciously—personal problems. And I feel relieved if I develop the subject as a story. Once I have that subject, I look for the best shape to give it—some structure, some form that will help me express all I want to. In *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth,* I wrote about those people from my childhood who had been close to me, people about whom I had a lot of information because they had talked to me a lot. As a matter of fact, they had devoted time to me because they were mostly misfits with not much else to do. But in that novel, I wasn't able to deal with the other kinds of people, the triumphant ones, the ones who had had less time for me when I was young. I had a much less precise memory of them; for me, they were really mysterious characters: the professionals, the beautiful girls who were surrounded by suitors—all those who had worked well within the system, the system of machismo, of oppression that was the only system at that time. I don't think that it has changed much in Argentina but at least we (almost everyone) are conscious of it now. In those days, not to fit into the pattern was a great source of anguish. We thought that that pattern was the only one, the pattern of Nature: girls had to be desirable objects and men had to be terribly strong without any hesitation. I was only able to deal with these conformist types in a literary way after my return to Argentina in 1967. I had been living abroad for ten years by then and I had written *Rita Hayworth* in Rome and in New York without any need for research because I had all the necessary information. I had the whole burden of memory inside me.

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But I couldn't have written *Heartbreak Tango* without that return, because I met, quite by chance, these triumphant figures of twenty years ago who were by now all very, very disappointed with life. The system they had accepted hadn't been kind to them. I didn't need to go back to my small town to find them. In Buenos Aires, I could meet them or hear about what had been their fate, and knowing their point of arrival helped me to reconstruct those earlier days.

Christ: Your writing has been a cause, then, for the awakening you mentioned?

Puig: I wasn't aware of all this when I started *Rita Hayworth.* At that time, in March of 1962, when I started to write the book, all I wanted to describe was my big, big failure with authority—my inability to embody authority when the situation required it. For instance, I hadn't been able to believe in my authority while working in films. When I began the novel, the liberation movements were not well known and all I wanted to do was tell myself about my failure, knowing that something was wrong and thinking that most of the blame was mine.

Christ: Are your books recognized in Argentina as social criticism?

Puig: Yes, I think they are but not very openly. You see, I think that if you deal with reality and if you choose a more-or-less good, let's say representative, example of reality, an expressive example, then the criticism is implicit.

Christ: That's really why I asked what I did at the beginning. When you represent your personal problem and then impose the literary form, say, *of the folletín* or detective story you create an ironic attitude toward the problem.

Puig: That started with *Rita Hayworth,* because I saw the need for humor. I wouldn't have had the stamina to go through all that painful autobiographical stuff without some trick that would lighten things a bit. Since the novel was all about problems that I've never been able to solve, I needed the humor. I couldn't have done the book without that. Anyhow, all the process of *Rita Hayworth* was mysterious in that I never had a structure to start with. I just found the form—if there is a form to the book—as I was writing it. The device of putting one chapter from the beginning at the end really was a last-minute decision. I had thought that this chapter, the one about the father's youth, should have come in chronological order; that is, at the beginning. But then I realized that the reader could identify better with the wife and son's search for this man, who is always hidden behind the mask of the strong macho, if the reader accompanied them on their search. Giving the reader all the information about this guy at the beginning would have been wrong, so

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I saved it for the end. In the meantime, the reader has had the chance to build his own image of the father according to the appearances.

Christ: In other words, the writing of the book was the discovery of its form? What about your other books?

Puig: Yes, that's right. In my second novel, *Heartbreak Tango,* there was, on the contrary, a structure to work with from the very beginning. Let me tell you about it. When I received all the information about these people on my return to my country in 1967, I immediately felt the need to organize it, to amalgamate it with the partial information I had from childhood. Their ultimate failure really touched me a lot and that is why I needed to write *Heartbreak Tango.* Years before, I had admired these people, and I had feared them and rejected them at the same time—their strength, their use of authority was unpleasant to me. Meanwhile they had a certain shine, a self-assurance that was fascinating. The story was all about failure: the failure of people who had believed in all the lies of authority. And in the rhetoric of passion too. They had believed the words of the songs: love was something that everything else had to be sacrificed to. But, these middle-class people had not really acted according to passion. Their real attitude was a scheming one, a calculating one—a Catholic, middle class, cold approach to things, always directed to climbing a little further up on the social scale. As a matter of fact, they had betrayed their belief in passion by their conduct. So I thought it would be interesting to find a form that would contain that contradiction, to repeat the characters' contradiction in the form of the book. I considered the idea of using the structure of the serials but at the same time of sustaining it with a lot of realistic detail. So suspense and romance had to be emphasized, each chapter had to end at a crucial moment. I narrated by *escamoteando,* by palming some of the incidents—the way a magician does—and not revealing them in their proper chronological order — the tricks of the *folletín* . At the same time, I thought of a very distant narrator — if there was a narrator at all — giving a disinterested, neutral, dispassionate approach to all this.

Christ: So while your work superficially has a well-made quality to it, you do not work from circumstance to character, but in reverse of that formula?

Puig: Yes. Some of the characters in *Heartbreak Tango* have just one source of inspiration, one person who really existed; some are a combination, an alchemy of two or three people. All of the episodes really took place, maybe not in that order and not in the same household. But in that book, everything really happened at one time or another. The same is true about *Rita Hayworth,* where ninety-five per cent of the stuff is real and

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the other five per cent accounts for an added dash of pink I gave it to make all that blackness believable. I've been told that it is a very somber book. If I had told things as they had happened, then no one would have accepted it as a reflection of reality. The reality of the pampas was much too dark to be believable.

Christ: Were any of the literary models for this encounter of romantic illusion and disinterested reality—*Don Quixote,* for example, or *Madam Bovary*—of use to you?

Puig: I am never aware of literature when I am writing, never think of literary models. Never, never, never, ever. But there is something interesting here. When I started to write *Rita Hayworth,* it was out of a need to face, to understand my own failure to communicate with people, my failure to write good, amusing film scripts and, later, to direct them. But this investigation that I was carrying on in myself had to be done—even if just for me—according to a certain esthetic code. Look, up until I was twenty-five, I had always rejected reality. I wanted to believe that the reality of life was MGM films. The rest was "B" picture stuff that didn't interest me at all. I thought that somewhere—in Europe, in Hollywood—I would be able to live at that level of glamor, of explicit, clean passion. I was even ready to suffer. But to suffer with glamor. Maybe that's why Garbo was so important to me: because she could make such beauty out of a character's painful moment. Simultaneously, though, I had the need to face reality, to come to terms with myself. I had this fantastic belief in film fiction, which for me was not just film but the whole world of fantasy, of imagination, and, of course, of beauty. To live in terms of beauty, that's what I wanted. What helped me in literature was that I could put both things together—reality and beauty. If not in life, at least in literature. For myself at least, my books are always investigations, researches, certain ways of looking at problems that are mine, and not only mine, I hope. That research, however, has to be done with an esthetic rigor. The reality must be recreated and sustained at the same time and analyzed at the same time by a wish to create beauty. Beauty, in this case, is form.

Christ: Many readers seem to have missed the point of the form.

Puig: That happened with my first two novels. With the third I got a little more respect. People would say: oh, those books are just taped records of reality; you went out into the streets and recorded the voices of the people, that's all. That made me furious. Even if the characters' voices were the only material—and they were not— I was "editing" them just as other writers edit cultured, written language. This was a matter that I had made clear to myself from the first day that I started to write

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literature: the fact that I was dealing with reality wasn't enough; reality had to be told in terms of beauty, otherwise there was no satisfaction for me.

Christ: When you speak of this esthetic rigor, you are speaking, for an English-reading audience, of technical devices very much associated with Joyce; most glaringly, I suppose, in the case of *Heartbreak Tango* and *The Buenos Aires Affair,* with the catechism technique of the "Ithaca" chapter in *Ulysses.*

Puig: I have never read *Ulysses* all the way through. In truth, all I did was peruse it. I haven't even read all of Molly Bloom's monologue. But what I saw in the book was the immense freedom, which was very stimulating, very liberating to me. I learned that there was no need to tell the story with just one technical device. Of course, I saw *Ulysses* years and years before I started to write and at that time I had no idea that I would ever write. Perhaps these were examples that guided me unconsciously.

Christ: But surely some of your devices are taken from films. For example, the one-sided conversation is something we all know from film, from radio. The extradordinary thing is to *read* such a conversation.

Puig: I must tell you how the first one-sided conversation started. In *Rita Hayworth,* Choli's chapter, Chapter IV, was one more monologue. But when I went back to it (it was the second or third monologue I wrote after writing all the novel) it was weak. It gave too much information about Mita, the wife of the man who is revealed at the end. And I didn't want to give away much information about her either until the middle of the book. Furthermore, I felt that I needed a certain variety at this earlier point in the book and another monologue wouldn't do. I saw that the inner world of Choli, this girlfriend of Mita, wasn't too interesting. It was better when she was speaking than when she was thinking, because all the color was in her language; her language contained her complete psychology. So I thought: why not do a conversation between Choli and Mita? Consequently, I wrote a dialogue between them in which Mita was very defensive and reserved since they were discussing her submissive attitude toward her husband. But then what she was saying was purely evasive, not interesting at all, which gave me the idea of eliminating it and leaving only Choli's side of the dialogue.

Christ: What you say is important because one of the most impressive things about *The Buenos Aires Affair* is what is *not* there. It is a detective story which really lacks both a detective and a corpse and the editing is largely cutting, in combination with reports of what is missing, lacking, unnoticed, unobserved.

Puig: I became more and more conscious of the need to eliminate all that

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might be superfluous. Most of this stems from my own limitations as a reader. I get bored very easily. My attention goes to sleep very easily. So I write for a reader who is like myself.

Christ: But *The Buenos Aires Affair* goes beyond that when you write about what the characters don't think about, what they don't read in the newspaper. It is a kind of filmic effect, as when a camera shows more of a scene than the actor in the scene actually sees.

Puig: What the characters do without paying attention interests me a lot. What doesn't go into the focus of your attention but is there anyway—that is interesting to me. I tried to show how the surroundings affect the character even if he doesn't notice it. In *The Buenos Aires Affair,* the police inspector glances over the newspaper and doesn't concentrate on it but you know that somehow all the tension in those pages goes into him, and that is what I wanted to show.

Christ: Latin American writers seem to have listened to and watched films very carefully and to have absorbed their techniques more eagerly than North American writers.

Puig: I don't know how to account for that, but maybe it is because we always considered films an important part of our culture, because they were foreign, and we saw them from a distance, with a certain perspective. Maybe also the fact that those things were happening in a foreign language had an importance for us.

Christ: The foreignness intensified the quality of myth?

Puig: Yes, you know, there is a very strange thing here: in Sweden Bergman is almost a laugh—really. They say there: if you knew Swedish, you couldn't take those dialogues seriously! It seems they are phony. The phoniness of the language allows no way to get into the magic of the image, which is undoubtedly there. The language wrecks everything. In our case, the dialogue of films was not understood and so it was registered in a different way.

Christ: This touches on the curious fact that when your books are translated into English, many of the references have a different connotation because they allude to our own culture. Consequently, many readers mistakenly see a campy quality where you intended none.

Puig: No, none at all. For me, those pieces of film dialogue that I use in *The Buenos Aires Affair* are—how can I say it—*meaningful.* Even more, I think that they are good dialogue, good writing. The quality is obvious in the excerpt from Sternberg's *Dishonored.* Still there is a resistance to accepting that quality. Why, I don't know. I think it may have to do with a *déclassé genre.*

Christ: In *The Day Of The Locust,* West wrote that "it is hard to laugh at the

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need for beauty and romance, no matter how tasteless, even horrible the results of that need are." Wouldn't you agree that the statement applies both to your intentions as an author and to the behavior of your characters?

Puig: One Hundred Per cent!

Christ: José Donoso has identified two predominant prose styles in contemporary Latin American fiction: the *idioma personal* and the *idioma general.* In the first, typified by Sarduy, the prose is idiosyncratic and self-consciously inventive in defining individuality while in the second, typified by your work, the prose style predates the narrative and is drawn largely from documents and the like in order both to recuperate lost or disappearing qualities of language and to express general qualities of the characters. In short, one seems more individual or lyric and the other seems more collective or documentary. How accurate does Donoso's distinction seem to you?

Puig: Well, let's say that in many cases I work with alienated languages. But then, what language is not alienated? I work with that stuff; it's my material. I agree with what Donoso says but one shouldn't forget that quite often, at a second stage, I cut that stuff to measure, which implies a transformation. Anyhow, I believe I've always used those degraded languages in order to make them significant, to turn them into *signs,* if I may use an impressive word. It may be a way of putting them at the service of literature or vice versa. Both literature and those languages should gain by the operation.

Christ: In the dream interview with the reporter from *Elle,* Gladys is offered the chance to pick the title for the interview and she says that she wants "glamorous Hitchcockian language, *The Buenos Aires Affair...*" On the basis of that, couldn't we say that parody is a chief element in the *idioma general,* as you use it, and that your books are very loving parody?

Puig: I agree in general. But parody is a word I don't trust too much because it carries some degree of scorn. Very seldom do I let myself go in the direction of scorn. What's more, there's a difficulty in distinguishing the degrees of parody in my works. Sometimes I deal with parodic characters; that is, characters who are mimicking some kind of remote model, and they are a parody in themselves. It's not me who's doing the parody. Then I've been told that *Heartbreak Tango* is a parody of serials and that *The Buenos Aires Affair* is a parody of detective stories. That's not right. At least that was not my intention. I like those two underrated genres and I tried to use them seriously, downright artistically. God help me.

Christ: Borges has been arguing in favor of this *déclassé genre* since the 1930s,

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at least. What was it like being an Argentine, writing in Spanish, and having him, a virtual monument who *is* Latin American literature to many readers, always there?

Puig: I didn't feel overshadowed or intimidated, simply because Borges is interested in other things. There was no need to rebel since he's devoted to such different areas. If he had been writing a serial, I would have been intrigued...but that never came up, fortunately.

Christ: A different point of competitiveness is suggested by José Donoso in his *Historia personal del "boom,"* where he argues that the great Latin American novels of the 1960s grew longer and longer because the Boom writers were trying to outdo each other, while the next wave of writers, including you, reacted and went back to much shorter works.

Puig: I've never planned the length of my books. I just take the time to develop my subject, which has varied between 250 and 350 pages.

Christ: In a sense then, you could be considered as isolated, as writing for yourself?

Puig: Absolutely. I read very, very little. I go to the movies a lot. And I watch old films on TV. I read a lot at one time—between the ages of 15 and 25, but now I only read books about films, biographies or history books and chronicles, not fiction. I work all day with my own fiction, so I need something different in the evening. That's no judgment on fiction. It just doesn't serve my present needs.

Christ: You are a widely-translated author and, in keeping with what must be pretty much of a 20th-century custom, you collaborate with your translators.

Puig: Yes, and I have had a bad experience with the versions on which I did not collaborate, such as the Dutch and the German, where I didn't know the language. These editions have not been too successful.

Christ: So the translation is really part of your writing at this point. What language have you been most successfully translated into?

Puig: I think English—then Italian, and maybe Portuguese. I think my work goes well with America. Here there is the same fear of being corny. The same fear of ridicule. Self-consciousness. This is what makes Americans so interesting to me: they never, never take themselves for granted. There is always self-searching, a certain *desconfianza.* In spite of all the differences between Argentina and the U.S., there is something important in common. The corny side of my characters is understood here, while in France, for instance, the understanding is very limited. Maybe it has to do with a country of immigrants, a country of children of immigrants. At home, Argentines and Americans seldom have the correct models for speech. Even in Italy, which is certainly not a country

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of recent immigration, they have the dialect problem, so that whenever they go into proper Italian, there is always this sense of insecurity, because it is not the household language. That's why, in the written language, they can fall into excesses since they are going into a cultural field that doesn't exist in their kitchen sink.

Christ: The nature of the language also presents problems. For example, Spanish tends to glide on commas as if they were casters, while literary English tends to be far more periodic.

Puig: The translator, Suzanne Jill Levine, and I do a lot of rewriting after her translation is finished. We feel the need for a cut or for a certain bridge between sentences if I don't want a full stop. Marian Skedgell, our editor, understood from the beginning that this was an experimental authorship, so she put a stop to all editorial interference from the copy desk. There were very few changes, almost none, in the last book.

Christ: Previously you have shied away from discussing the political or social implication of your work, yet politics and the social situation have crept closer to the foreground in each of your books.

Puig: Especially in the fourth novel which has just been sent to the printer. In the past, I didn't want to talk about things that I wasn't sure about. Now I see certain things more clearly.

Christ: Isn't this clarity partly the result of your books' growing up, in the sense that the first is focused on childhood, the second on late adolescence and early adulthood and the third on adulthood?

Puig: Yes, but that hasn't been voluntary. It is just that I've been slowly coming to see things more clearly. I *had* to investigate my childhood first.

Christ: The sexual theme and the violence have been coming more to the foreground too.

Puig: In the first book, I was dealing with the oppression of women, with a latent homosexual child growing up and I didn't want to make any judgment about those cases. I just wanted to describe them. I didn't understand why the women were like that or why the child was being modeled into a homosexual. But lately I have seen the motivation. Now I think I know.

Christ: You mean the social motivation rather than the individual motivation with which you began?

Puig: Yes. I see the social and political tensions more clearly. What helped me mainly were all the liberation movements that have taken place lately, in Argentina as well as here. The women's liberation movement is one of the most important things that ever happened. At first women thought that they had to be weak, frail, in order to *be,* especially when

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searching for sexual pleasure. That was the big trap, the big lie.

Christ: How is this awareness reflected in *The Buenos Aires Affair?*

Puig: When I wrote *Rita Hayworth,* I still believed in Clark Gable as a force of Nature. I thought it was a cruel Nature that had made this strong man and these weak Harlows but that it was, in fact, Nature's law. Now I am convinced that Clark Gable is an historical-cultural product, not Nature's creature. In *The Buenos Aires Affair,* I tried to explore the final consequences of the "frail" attitude in women, which is masochism.

Christ: So that novel is an earlier step in the development because woman does not realize the sado-masochistic basis of the relationship?

Puig: Yes. But in the fourth book, she realizes it!

Christ: What does that mean for you?

Puig: For me it means a lot. It means almost everything because I myself have always rejected the role of the authoritarian male. There was something that I hated about it even though I thought that it was natural. I hated it in spite of its apparently being Nature's decision. Now I consider the rejection of authority, which has cost me so much trouble throughout my life, an unconscious rebellion, but a healthy one.

Christ: The next phase?

Puig: The next phase is the book I am writing now. Look, even if there were a perfect Marxist society, where everything was shared in the best human spirit, there would still be one capital—physical beauty, sexual beauty. That wouldn't be shared. And that's one point that I want to develop in my new book. There are many ways to hunger in life and we're conscious of the need for food, for a roof, but repression has stopped the need for sex from being clarified. At least fifty per cent of the world's population is sexually starved. I think of the old, the ugly. It's a very cruel thing that no one wants to acknowledge. Men dictate the rules, men with power who have their sexual problems solved through their power and they don't want to devote any attention to this need because it is not one of *their* needs. It is as cruel as not caring about children starving. There are many hungers and this is one that should be attended to.

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Barbara Rose

AMERICA AS PARADISE

Il n'y a de vieux en Amerique que les bois.
---Chateaubriand, *Voyage en Amerique*, 1836

Writing to Ferdinand and Isabella during his third voyage to America in 1498, Columbus reported he believed he had found that fabled terrestrial paradise lost to man since biblical days. He had by this time come to the conclusion that the world was not flat but pear-shaped like a woman's breast; in this case, the earthly paradise, source of the four rivers of Eden, would be located at a spot roughly corresponding to the nipple. Columbus himself did not dare enter the sacred garden, but he was confident he had located nothing less than paradise on earth.

Given the historical context within which America was discovered, Columbus was compelled to interpret his voyages as a religious mission. For only a millenarian interpretation of the identity of the new world was grand enough to serve as counter-propaganda against the thundering of the old world reformist preachers already beginning to predict a coming apocalypse. From the moment of its discovery, the innocence and promise of America were linked conceptually with the exhaustion and corruption of Europe. In Mircea Eliade's words, America was "born under the sign of eschatology." Thus it was inevitable that millenial prophecies and fantasies of redemption should provide the content of the original imagery chosen to represent the unknown hemisphere to the West. Beginning with Columbus, successive generations of writers, painters, philosophers and theologians on both sides of the Atlantic imagined America as the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy of an earthly paradise, where regenerate humanity would be born again into a state of unperturbed innocence, a recreation of the happy infancy man enjoyed as part of unconscious nature, before he had tasted the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Such comforting milennial fantasies did not fade easily; they had and continue to have vast repercussions for American civilization.

By the nineteenth century, collective fantasies of a new Eden focused themselves on the idea of the American wilderness as a vast, if not infinite,

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virginal landscape, undefiled by man's presence and the destructiveness of his acts, glorified instead by the supernatural powers of nature displaying awesome light and color spectacles and forms grander than anything man or his art had ever created. Unlike idyllic Claudian scenes from which their Arcadian formula was derived, these landscapes did not give relatively epic scale to nature by peopling hills and valleys with *staffage* figures; they were as unpopulated as the primeval American wilderness they depicted.

Recently a number of these paintings of the natural wonders of the new world, which Americans had a great investment in believing would supplant the man-made marvels of antiquity, was assembled in the Museum of Modern Art exhibition titled "The Natural Paradise." Accompanied by a catalogue with texts by Professors Robert Rosenblum, John Wilmerding, and Barbara Novak, the exhibition marked a considerable departure from the formalist, anti-American bias for which MOMA has been known since it was founded in 1929 to promote the cause of modern art, which, in the opinion of its founders, was mainly made in Paris. Another important new direction for the museum: "The Natural Paradise" is the first Museum of Modern Art exhibition based on an essentially iconographical theme spanning more than one hundred years.

As it seemed to represent an effort at institutional self-criticism, one expected "The Natural Paradise" to have been greeted with generous acclaim; instead, it was roundly condemned by critics of such divergent persuasions as Hilton Kramer, Harold Rosenberg, and Thomas B. Hess. No doubt, there is a lot to say against a catalogue of multiple authorship that lacks any unifying point of view, as well as against inconsistent selection of works that hardly seemed a major effort on the part of the museum to master its vast resources in obtaining the best paintings, or even those most successfully illustrating the thesis of the show. One could not imagine the Museum of Modern Art treating an exhibition of French art of any kind with so little responsibility. But it is understandable that the idea of housing those very premodern and antimodernist styles that MOMA was originally established to challenge could hardly inspire the museum to consider "The Natural Paradise" a very serious occasion. Even taking into consideration the lack of total commitment to an exhibition that defied the very principles on which a Museum of Modern Art was established, the exhibition was unnecessarily tacky, an uncritical jumble of acknowledged masterpieces, third-rate salon paintings, and popular academic art.

The presence of so much minor and retardataire art can be written off to some extent by arguing that the exhibition had essentially an iconographic focus; nevertheless one suspects that MOMA is guilty of concluding that if it is too confusing to look forward, it is just as well to look back

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and rehabilitate mediocre painters. For if nothing radically "new" appears to be surfacing, then "new" names can just as well be dredged up from the dead past. The presence of really inferior painting at the Museum of Modern Art is just one more indication of the massive cultural confusion of recent years. In theme, style, and content, "The Natural Paradise" was a reactionary exhibition, imitating the worst elements of Thomas Hoving's penchant for recreating the crowded installations that were a pleasure to the nineteenth-century eye but are a disaster for the contemporary viewer who wishes to concentrate on an individual work. Reaction, however, is not inappropriate to the present moment; and one regrets not that this exhibition was done, but that it was not done better.

MOMA's superficial treatment of such a crucial issue in the history of American art seems a reflection of the general consensus, only now changing, that the history of American art is a subject not worthy of the kind of attention we might give to classical, Renaissance, or modern French art. So superficial was the treatment of the purported theme of the show, that every time an opportunity to make a specific connection based on indisputable documentary evidence was available, that opportunity was ignored. For example, to establish Jackson Pollock's enduring debt to Albert Pinkham Ryder, one would only have had to see one of Pollock's early oil studies of the thirties juxtaposed with a Ryder seascape to recognize the origin of the turbulent swirling motifs that remain a constant of Pollack's work beginning with the drip paintings. There are innumerable examples of other comparable oversights, such as the influence of the slashing verticals in Jonas Lie's 1913 painting *The Conquerors: Culebra Cut*—according to Thomas B. Hess "one of the paintings Newman remembered seeing as a boy in his many visits to the Metropolitan Museum"—on the structure of Newman's earliest abstractions. Both the Lie painting in question as well as a Newman were in the show, but no connection between them was made in the exhibition or in the catalogue. The net effect of so many missed opportunities to establish the genuine relationship between nineteenth and twentieth century American works indicates how pervasive is the idea that American art cannot be, or is not worthy of being, subjected to the kind of close scrutiny art historical methodology applies to the study of the rest of Western art.

The approach of "The Natural Paradise" to the study of American art is so slipshod, it is as if another set of standards were being applied than those we normally associate with the meticulous scholarship characteristic of the publications of the Museum of Modern Art. For example, when we read Professor Wilmerding's statement regarding the abstract expressionists that "Like their literary contemporaries, the Beat poets and writers,

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especially Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Jack Kerouac, they were (as the latter's book stated) On the Road," we begin to wonder where scholarly fact ends and popular fiction begins. In the first place, the abstract expressionists were not contemporaries of the Beat generation; and in the second, the only road they were on with any frequency was the road to East Hampton—where they often fled to escape the brutal urbanism of New York. The profound mystical investigations of the group of abstract expressionists including Pollock, Still, Newman, Rothko, Gottlieb, Reinhardt, and Krasner (the last two missing from the exhibition) in their search for universal subject matter has virtually nothing in common with the cheap drug-oriented "highs" of the Beatniks and their descendants, the Hippies. It is a terrible disservice to great art to confuse its themes with those of mediocre literature, particularly mediocre literature of a different epoch.

Because it served an important idea poorly, "The Natural Paradise" was excruciatingly frustrating. For ever since John McCoubrey published his book on *The American Tradition in Art* in 1961, a suspicion that there is some connection between postwar American painting and earlier chapters in the history of American art has been growing in force. This notion has been resisted by institutions like the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum because of their own peculiar histories. For MOMA, the moment American Art achieved the quality of European painting, it became annexed to the history of the School of Paris; for the Whitney, the prejudice of its founder, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, in favor of Ash Can painting, meant that abstract art, even so "American" an abstract art as that produced by the painters of the Stieglitz circle, would be overshadowed by the American Scene. Both the Francophilia of the MOMA and the Francophobia of the Whitney have militated up until this time against any efforts at establishing a continuity within the history of American Art; and many critics continue to dismiss the thesis that there is in fact a discernable thread of continuity connecting the romantic landscapes of the Luminists and Hudson River school with the visionary art of the Stieglitz circle, as well as with the metaphysical element of abstract expressionism. Because of such prejudicies, "The Natural Paradise" was unfairly dismissed as pure hokum dreamed up by its organizer, MOMA curator Kynaston McShine. For there is a very real case to be made that this particular topic is the central issue in American art history, and it is especially significant that the Museum of Modern Art chose to sponsor such a show.

Despite its many weaknesses, "The Natural Paradise" was a signal occasion, if only because it indicated a change in the point of view of the Museum of Modern Art, so influential in shaping established opinion. An iconographical show at the Museum of Modern Art means recognition of a

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general reaction against the formalist approach of Clement Greenberg, who successfully reduced the whole of the content of art to that which can be objectively described. Greenberg's refusal to deal with any emotional content not verifiable in positivist terms determined the reductionist direction of recent criticism. And Greenberg's writing was probably as responsible as anything else for the development of a reductive minimal art, emerging in calculated respnse to that criticism . It is these reductionist positivist attitudes "The Natural Paradise" implicitly condemns.

Of course one cannot hold Greenberg entirely responsible for the rigid formalist bias of American art criticism, which degenerated in the sixties into a belated version in the plastic arts of what the "new criticism" was to literature. It has taken the art world longer than the literary world to shake off the formalist approach because formalism was more firmly ingrained in art criticism. Indeed there were a few alternatives to formal analysis since the original texts on modern aesthetics to be widely diffused in America were those of the English formalists Roger Fry and Clive Bell. These texts were in turn the basis of the formalist teachings of Dr. Albert Barnes and the staff of the Barnes Foundation. They also profoundly affected the views of Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art during its formative years, whose book on *Cubism and Abstract Art* published in 1936 was criticized at the time in a review by Meyer Schapiro for its narrowly mechanistic approach to works of art.

"The Natural Paradise" undoubtedly intended to reverse the emphasis on the purely formal element in art, but the irony is that the impact of the formalist school on both art history as well as art criticism has been so decisive that MOMA's case for a continuity of metaphysical content in American painting was sometimes sabotaged by the attempt to base connections on nonexistent or obscure formal analogies. For example, in his catalogue essay "The Primal American Scene," the distinguished art historian Robert Rosenblum dwells on the influence of Augustus Vincent Tack, a painter active in the twenties and thirties collected mainly by Duncan Phillips, on the art of the abstract expressionist, Clyfford Still. Comparing the works in reproductions or in slides, one might conceivably imagine a resemblance between Tack's pale peaked mountains and waves, stylized and flattened in the manner of the Japanism popular in the art schools of his day, with Still's intensely colored, jagged, restless abstract forms. Still and Tack, of course, are not hung side by side in the exhibition; such a juxtaposition would devastate any argument based on analogies of structure, facture, surface or color. It is evident that no documents can be found linking the two artists because indeed any similarity is strictly coincidental. Tack was essentially a decorator working in an Orientalizing style derived

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from the Viennese Sezession, whereas Still is a modernist innovator who synthesized impressionist and surrealist sources into a personal imagery, whose evolution can be traced step by step in a chronological study of the development of his own style.

Although one may dispute formal analogies between Still and Tack, there is reason to exhibit them both in the same context because their work, although not on the same level qualitatively, evokes in the viewer another kind of response from that evoked by conventional abstraction or of conventional landscape. Still's great walls of impasto, although nominally abstract, have not failed to suggest to many viewers dark crevices and caverns, lightning bolts and other natural forms and phenomena familiar as typical themes of nineteenth-century American painting.

Such allusive correspondence between abstract expressionist works and earlier American painting reveal that "The Natural Paradise" is not a show about landscape at all; it is, for the most and best part, an exhibition of religious paintings by Protestant artists forbidden to paint the face of God, who found a metaphor for the Creator in impersonal images of nature at the moment of Creation as a timeless, prehistoric wilderness or desert lit by an unearthly light. Later this supernatural glow was translated by Jewish abstract painters like Gottlieb, Newman and Rothko into fields of color painted so transparently that light emanated from within the painting, as it had radiated from the backgrounds of the works of metaphysical landscape painters who worked before them.

Although there is enough information available in published form to document the mystical sources of the imagery of Newman, Pollock, Gorky, Rothko et al., no such concrete discussion takes place in the catalogue of "The Natural Paradise." Fortunately, a useful section of texts collected by Professor Barbara Novak relates nineteenth-century American aesthetics to the concepts of philosophers like Emerson and Thoreau, whose Transcendental ideas regarding a pantheistic natural religion had and continue to have such a profound influence on American thought and culture. In her seminal book *Nineteenth Century American Painting,* Novak has situated the Luminist school of metaphysical landscape painting within the general context of Transcendentalist thought; it now remains for scholars to substantiate connections suggested by the texts she has assembled describing luminism, a term which can broadly be used to encompass the entire range of landscape painting using light as a metaphor for the divine, with twentieth-century abstract American art expressing Transcendental themes.

The American alternative to impressionism, luminism was a retardataire, naturalistic style of landscape painting which deliberately rejected

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French art because American artists regarded impressionism as a scientific, secular attitude toward nature, incompatible with the Transcendentalist idea of nature as a metaphysical force of mysterious origin. As Professor Novak points out, luminism was intentionally anti-impressionist and antimodernist. Yet more evidence of the American hostility toward modernism is documented in *The Machine in the Garden,* Leo Marx's study of the struggle between the pastoral ideal of agricultural America and the progressive demands of capitalist expansion through industrialization. More that is pertinent to the iconography of American art is contained in his book, *The Machine in the Garden,* than in the catalogue of "The Natural Paradise," which indicates that cultural historians may have more to contribute to a study of American art at this point than do art historians. Of particular interest in a study of antiprogressive, antimodernist attitudes in America is Leo Marx's suggestion that the resistance to industrialization was tied to the fear that to embrace the machine was to give up the fantasy of the earthly paradise, a fantasy central to American popular religions. The profoundly reactionary flavor of American popular religions, further study ought to show, affected American art to a far greater degree than has been acknowledged .

One of the peculiarities of abstract expressionism as a modern style is that as much as earlier American nature painters, the abstract expressionists rejected industrialization, deliberately turning their backs on that very geometric machine imagery which has been identified as *the* modern theme. Moreoever, as French as some of its techniques are, abstract expressionism, or at least a good part of it, is related to earlier American art both in its peculiar conception of history as well as in its hostility to the European modernist ideal of an art for art's sake. In any discussion of the presence of a transcendental or metaphysical element in abstract expressionism, Barnett Newman is certainly a key personality, since he so often spoke for his colleagues. In December, 1948, a few months before he painted *Horizon Light*—a work not included in "The Natural Paradise" that does indeed resemble an abstraction of a luminist landscape—Newman published an article in *The Tiger's Eye,* a little magazine, titled "The Sublime is Now." This essay is the specific document linking abstract expressionist aesthetics to earlier conceptions of the sublime as a transcendental category, especially those that provided the aesthetic for the luminist school.

In the essay, Newman denounces the "failure of European art to achieve the sublime" as the result of a "blind desire to exist inside the reality of sensation," reiterating the luminists' original critique of impressionist empiricism. Because impressionism did not express faith in nature as the manifestation of a divine presence, but was merely a matter of

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scientific observation, reflecting a modernist consciousness of nature dependent not on mystical illumination but physical laws, it was not acceptable to the luminists. Similarly, for Newman, modern European art was to be rejected because it was not based on faith. Predicting the rebirth of art in America, where the artist was free from "the obsolete props of an outmoded and antiquated legend," Newman proposed a high-minded program for his contemporaries: "I believe," he wrote, "that here in America, some of us, free from the weight of European culture, are finding the answer, by completely denying that art has any concern with the problem of beauty and where to find it....We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions."

Once, again, in Newman's high-flown rhetoric, we find American innocence and youth contrasted with European corruption and fatigue. We are reminded of the scene engraved by the Dutch print-maker known as Stradanus around 1600 depicting America as a virginal young woman, trailing a few discrete feathers and surrounded by nude picnicking noble savages who rises from her hammock to navigator Vespucci, bowed under by the weight of his voluminous civilized garb. That civilization was European whereas nature was American gave birth to the idea that the important history of America was natural history, not art history. Such an idea had been part of artistic consciousness since the colonial period. When Charles Wilson Peale painted his self-portrait, he showed himself proudly inviting the public into the museum he had established in Philadelphia. Whereas a European artist like David Teniers would have painted himself surrounded by the glory of classic art, Peale pulls back a curtain to reveal a collection of stuffed birds and animals—for his museum was essentially a museum of natural history.

For generations, the lack of an indigenous art history was experienced as a terrible handicap by American painters. However, the belief that history was European whereas nature, especially unspoiled nature, was American, gave artists beginning with the luminists and the Hudson River school and its offshoots an original theme. That nature was so often depicted as wilderness gave such scenes a millenarian, religious dimension in their references to Paradise before the Fall. In the same sense, the deserted mystical landscapes of Hartley, Dove and O'Keeffe also look archaic, if not prehistoric. By the time the abstract expressionists began casting about for universal symbols, they were reinforced in their desire to seek prehistoric, timeless themes by such pictorial precedents as well as by Jungian literature, which indicated the existence of a racial memory that was outside of historical consciousness. Because history had been made in Europe, many American artists, including the abstract expressionists as

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well as a group of contemporary artists involved with earthworks and archeological art, have wished to escape history, to exist outside its framework, in this case the insistence of modernism on an historical consciousness became just one more reason that modernism so frequently found and continues to find resistance in America.

Returning to Newman's remarks concerning the sublime, we find other peculiarly American prejudices against an art for art's sake (instead of an art for God's sake) articulated. In *Prophetic Pictures,* Nathanial Hawthorne indicated the basis, deeply embedded in Puritan thought—and as it turned out for Jewish painters like Newman, Rothko and Gottlieb as deeply embedded in Old Testament iconoclasm—of the American antagonism to the aesthetic. "Some deemed it an offense against the Mosaic law, and even a presumtuous mockery of the Creator," Hawthorne wrote, "to bring into existence such lively images of his creatures."

In the recurrent rejection of the category of the aesthetic as trivial and void of higher meaning, there is a consistency connecting the disparate chapters in American art that may explain even the virulence of the conceptualists' attack against an art for art's sake as meaningless decoration. Except for Gorky, de Kooning and Hofmann, who are not included in "The Natural Paradise," the abstract expressionists were not of course nature painters; but there is a good argument to be made that they were essentially religious painters who found many correspondences between the natural religion of Transcendentalism, the concept of the sublime as a transcendental category, and transcendental ideas in Eastern religions. To see the New York school as merely the lineal descendent and legitimate heir of a mainstream tradition of French art is to miss a great deal of its complexity and meaning. Abstract expressionism flowered in New York not merely because Hitler made Europe unsafe, but because a tradition of metaphysical painting which could provide a profound content for art was already established in America. One hopes that the next time this tradition is examined, a more convincing case for its existence than that made by "The Natural Paradise" can be established.

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Gary Stephens

HAUNTED AMERICANA: The Endurance of American Realism

In 1917 Sherwood Anderson wrote an essay on Theodore Dreiser which began:

> For a long time I have believed that crudity is an inevitable quality in the production of a really significant present-day American literature. How indeed is one to escape the obvious fact that there is as yet no native subtlety of thought or living among us? And if we are a crude and childlike people how can our literature hope to escape the influence of that fact? Why indeed should we want it to escape?

The moment at which Anderson was writing was pivotal, and his statement, though an apology for his own literary aspirations, seems to look both ways from that moment. It is both the expression of a new experimental primitivism and an illumination of the condition under which the literature of Dreiser, Howells, Twain, and others in the previous three decades had been written. And although the assertion that "crudity is an inevitable quality in the production of a really significant present-day American literature" is problematic, it is one which now sounds provocative.

For although contemporary writing in America is technically refined and intellectually advanced, this development has not led to a corresponding increase in the appeal, power, or vitality of our literature. Indeed, as the technical skills of writers of fiction have increased in disproportionate relation to the simple power of literature to hold an audience and move it with a new imaginative vision, technique *per se* has begun to seem more and more insistent. Too many works seem reducible to attempts to see how far an idea or a technical gimmick will go. To this extent our literary urbanity threatens to become something deadening and oppressive, and in this

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context Anderson's de-emphasis of technique sounds somehow fresh. The time seems ripe to look again at the work of those writers whose ideas Anderson echoes in his own way, those writers whose efforts constitute the movement for American literary realism.

For three decades realism has been of little critical interest. This is most obviously so because the work of the realists, with its technical weakness, its intellectual parochialism, and its failure to anticipate the rich infusion of European modernism into American literature and life, has seemed oppressive and oppressed. Dreiser's animal vitality, his undeniable power, has withstood repeated critical attacks; but the surface of his work has seemed so mesmeric and so uncomfortably cluttered with the banal stuff of the popular period stories which he told, that his work has seemed either above or below our ability to talk about it. His power seems so much the result of sheer density and bulk that the mass of his material alone is off-putting. The voice of Mark Twain's Huck has remained alive as a device which opens again and again some essentially wonderful experience of American life. But the novel for which Huck is the voice is flawed and Twain's work as a whole has come to seem increasingly unfunny and fatigued. Howells now enjoys some respect as a serious man who was a skillful observer and creator of plots, and whose production of over forty novels and countless articles and reviews constituted the backbone of the literary life of his time. But, no less problematic than he ever was, Howells no longer provokes even the antipathy which he was once famous for arousing. He is taught but not read.

Indeed, with the exclusion of Henry James, the work of all the writers, major and minor, associated with realism, even at its best seems somehow dull. Their work endures and will endure, but it does so by virtue of a power which holds and draws the reader on long after the reader wishes the work were finished. American realism is muffled by its affirmation of a time-bound, period piece, self-consciously minimal idea of what is "real," a notion of reality that seems dreary not simply because it reflects the subdued color of the lives about which the realists wrote, but dreary because it indicates a limited conception of the imagination itself.

Yet the realists wrote within imaginative structures because they were involved in an effort to overcome the attitude toward art which they found prevalent in turn-of-the-century America. In his own time Henry James best understood this cultural attitude. He saw that for the common reader fiction was to be either "instructive" or "amusing": the former meant didactic, the latter frivolous, and neither left room for the free play of serious art. In his essay "The Art of Fiction" he wrote that "'Art,' in our Protestant communities, where so many things have got so strangely

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twisted about, is supposed in certain circles to have some vaguely injurious effect upon those who let it weigh in the balance." For the artistic preoccupation, "the search for form," is "assumed to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction." But the full depth of James's awareness and his consequent freedom to create a fiction which could be, like a painted portrait, finished, sufficient, "a personal, a direct impression of life," without overt "moral" instructiveness, set him off from his fellow realists in America.

They felt too much the weight of the arguments which James attacked as pernicious, the arguments against the concern with form and artistic considerations *per se*. Their struggle was fundamentally confused by the fact that they shared to such a large extent the suspicion of art they were trying to resist. As a result, they were always emotionally compromised: writing without the personal freedom to give themselves to "Art" and let moral information follow however it would, they sought a middle way. They wanted to write in a way that was instructive about daily life, fundamentally moral, and yet not a distortion of reality. Thus, they wrote with an ideal vision of our culture in mind, a vision which they believed their writing could bring into existence. Paradoxically, then, their attendance upon the real is so infused with notions of the ideal, that their work is often strangely private, paying homage to old pieties which, though perhaps honorable, have not proven of enduring interest.

One finds Howells, for example, downgrading the idea of a "great American novel" because it runs counter to his belief that the local color or regional life is the primary subject for fiction. As subjects for fiction, he says, it is the provincial that is most important, then the national, then the universal. And his disciple Hamlin Garland writes that it is not the business of the literature of a time to express universals but to "sincerely present its own minute and characteristic interpretation of life." This is not a simple call for inhibition of the imagination; to a considerable extent such advice was meant to discipline writing so that it would remain sharp and specific in the face of the flaccid, garish, and vapidly romantic literature of the period, a literature which was always straining after the "ideal." The realists' advice that to create the best and most important art a writer should focus upon the local and the time-bound is the logical development of their belief that the ideal pattern of life itself was to be found in the real life lived by men and women in America.

The deep, almost pietistic, belief in such essential patterns was obviously associated in part with the decline of religious belief and the growing confusion in the ideals associated with American life. They wrote to compensate for an apparent emptiness. But paradoxically, in order to

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compensate for the loss of the ideal, they needed an ideal to work from. And though Howells and Garland and Twain, Dreiser and the multitude of lesser writers denied, for the most part, that they were religious men, it is quite understandable that they used the residue of the old ideal systems left to them, and appealed to an ideal of "reality" that, in its essential unity and healing forcefulness, was fundamentally religious. Unable to locate clearly the source of those oppressive needs which they distinctly felt, they give the impression that they are up against cosmic forces. And crucial to an understanding of realistic fiction is a recognition of the realists' habit of thinking of their own enterprise as one which will save their own art and culture for all time from some mysterious evil, in much the same way a Christian soul is to be saved.

This essentially religious esthetic is made quite explicit by Hamlin Garland, who writes that the realist's task is to portray reality as it is and to believe that contemplation of this portrayal will help bring about the ideal life. The realist, says Garland, "writes of what is, and, at his best, suggests what is to be by contrast." The realist "aims to hasten the age of beauty and peace by delineating the ugliness and warfare of the present," with the result that "ever the converse arises in the mind of the reader." But even as Garland writes of this mysterious process which he calls "literary prophecy" he has to say that as the realist is aiming "to be perfectly truthful in his delineation of his relation to life, there is a tone, a color, which comes unconsciously into his utterance, like the sobbing stir of the muted violins beneath the frank clear song of the clarinet; and this tone is one of sorrow that the good time moves so slowly in its approach." This sorrowful tone seems to suggest a feeling on the part of the realist that the truthful treatment of the grim facts of contemporary life will have no clear effect upon the future. Garland's statement suggests a deep fear of futility, a sense that the mystical force which was to inform the plain and simple facts of daily life was not there. The cosmic hand which was to justify the place of the artist by making the "converse" of what he had to describe appear, did not exist.

From our perspective the esthetic effect of American literary realism is not the prophecy of beauty but the provocative demonstration of its own failure. The detailed descriptive work, the plots, the characters, endure as period-piece Americana, old things haunted with the failed ideals, hopes, dreams they were supposed to help make real. And yet as the works endure and the reader contemplates their drab failed quality, their peculiar hauntedness conveys, even today, a mysterious sense of loss which possesses, in the best work, a peculiar power. As we read we are oppressed by the loose, extended, cluttered, dated quality of the work. And yet, something draws

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us on. For all of its failure something about the fiction of the realists succeeds in conveying their faith in art. The question is how the realists, compromised as they were by their own tendency to yield to attitudes which had little tolerance for "Art," proceed to make fiction which, at its best, reflects their dilemma and serves as the only adequate expression of their complex faith in art.

The realists' approach to making fiction was to begin with the simple stories which people believed about themselves, "typical" stories of clichéd pattern of the kind found in newspapers, pulp novels, religious tracts, and dramatized on the popular stage. The realists took these stories and carefully, conservatively, corrected them to make them more "real," refining their melodramatic form in order to make the democratic ideals reflected in them more durable.

The ideology at the heart of these melodramatic stories can be summed up as a desire for success. Superficially this success seems monetary, social, and to some extent religious, but it also seems to imply some need for a deeper security, a need to make reality knowable and predictable and manageable for man's benefit. Within these stories one finds reflected the faith that any person, if he is fundamentally moral, can obtain the truth by consulting his own heartfelt feelings, and the basic truth which he finds in his own heart is that life in America is proceeding steadily toward some ideal state. Thus, although things might seem to be changing in such a way that morality counts for little, and the concentration of commercial and industrial power might be putting a few people into what might appear to be untouchable positions of power, while others seem locked into their poverty—all of this simply represents the normal quotient of evil in the world. It is to be expected, and does not contradict the view of the nation as a place where Providence insures the happiness of people if they are just, moral, and good. One need not involve oneself in competitive struggle now any more than in the benign rural past or in one's own happy home which is, after all, the real heart of national life. This distortion of complex human problems into a simple, paradigmatic form had the effect of keeping the public's moral faith strained but intact.

The realists accepted the assumption reflected in these melodramatic fictions that there was an essentially coherent meaning in the life of the common man in America. But because these simple stories distorted social, commercial, and political complexities, representing them as aspects of a simple idea of the evil that had to be tolerated in the world, and because they reduced the complex patterns of personal life lived in chronological time to a schematic story of salvation, the realist felt that he had to show that life was a great deal more complicated than melodramatic formulae

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would have the reader believe. To counter the melodrama's tendency to label complexity of detail as simply evil, the realists loaded their stories with detailed description and information in order to force the reader to recognize that attendance to the massive detail of modern life was essential to an adequate understanding of that life's meaning. And against the tendency to simplify a normal lifetime by reducing it to a scheme of salvation, the realists worked to make the reader aware of the neutral passage of time in itself, to awaken him to the accumulating quantity of moments lived one after the other over the years. Thus, the realists took the form of popular melodramatic stories and so burdened it with additional quantities of information about things and additional, apparently insignificant, episodes or moments, that they all but transformed the story structure. As a result, realistic fiction is often perceived to contain such masses of information and petty actions that the story, like life itself, has no certain shape, arrives at no certain conclusion.

But what an early realist like Howells did not realize was that the form of these melodramatic fictions and the coherence they suggested were indivisible. When the realists tried to correct the form and modify the vision inherent in it, they found no clear scheme to replace the one which they had apparently transformed. And because they found no such alternative scheme to replace the one which fell apart under the pressure of their modifications, their own work now seems tentative, open-ended, uncertain. Since they could imagine no meaningful end, they could make no sense out of time, and could not achieve a unified vision. As a result, things, details, quantity without any qualitative meaning, became the very expression of pointlessness.

The source of realism's dullness and its enduring intrigue, then, lies in the realists' efforts to create a literature that had, for lack of a better term, a healing power, a power to discover and convey a sense of unity among things. Howells and Garland desired to create literature that would extend the literate community to such an extent that the creation and appreciation of art would become an ongoing organic activity maintaining this sense of unity. Caught up on occasion in aspirations to prophecy, the realist writer hoped that his perception of reality would not only become the vision shared by the culture as a whole but that as a consequence of it the world would change.

And yet to heal the community whose sense of purpose had been fractured by rapid cultural change, a community which had lost any coherent vision of its own destiny, the realist writer had to provide an eschatology. And as the simple but coherent quasi-religious vision of the melodrama dissolved under the weight of the realist's corrections, the

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burden upon the writer became unbearable. One feels in realistic writing the claustrophobia of the single imagination up against this immense problem.

This sense of claustrophobia is registered most profoundly in the realist's creation of character, for a major theme of realist fiction is the powerless situation of the little man and the artist who identified with him. As the realists cautiously, hopefully, tried to create adequately detailed portrayals of human life as correctives to the thin and simply optimistic versions of heroism found in popular literature, they created neither hero nor anti-hero but sympathetic normal characters whose tales turn out to be loser's stories, stories about the common person's inevitable powerlessness, stories in which the reassurances of the melodrama are shown to be a lie. These characters are powerless and trapped in time; each moment of their lives is conditioned not by imagination, but by the dumb face of meaningless things. Their situation is one of spiritual claustrophobia marked by the slow tick of time. Time, divorced from any significant spiritual message, was simply and inevitably deadly.

The anxiety of the situation is revealed by the distance between the initial hopes of a character and the actual state of his life as shown in conclusion. The distance between initial expectation and the ultimate lack of fulfillment is characteristically so extreme that the protagonists find themselves confused, out of their depths, unable to comprehend and explain, and the writer is similarly bewildered and unable to conclude his account clearly. The ambiguous location of Huckleberry Finn within his "civilization" at the conclusion of his *Adventures,* the impoverished situation of Silas Lampham at the end of Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham,* and the death in the electric chair of Clyde Griffiths near the close of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* are all typical expressions of the fundamental impotence of the little man and the artist who hoped to create a decent order for him. The flat response of the narrative voice to the concluding situations in these works indicates a crisis of faith in the power of literature in American culture. For the response is neither a call for passionate social action nor for irony and acquiescense; it is more the expression of a blank anxiety attendant on a religious mystery. And perhaps it is the quasi-religious quality of this literature, the possibility of salvation glimpsed even in the most pessimistic vision, that despite the failure of the realists' public goals, and despite their deep private anxiety, gives their writing a power that transcends their failure.

As a consequence of its aspiration for success in a particular time, realism is a notoriously time-bound, period piece body of fiction. Yet to read a realistic work, which is laden with the failure of the writer and with

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the failure of the power of fiction, is to find oneself oppressed with the need to look again at experience, to be asked to try to discover what it is about life that defeats a man, and then to come to the aid of the cause of realism. Although it may be steeped in an evangelical melodramatism, a dated piece of American realistic fiction is still haunted by echoes that call to the reader, echoes that began as a call for salvation from the conditions of life itself.

Thus any reading of a work conceived as a realist enterprise requires some assessment of the dialectic between public assertion and hidden yearning, between the public story and the private one. Any evaluation of a realist work requires an assessment of the strain between the writer's sense of failure, his hopelessness, and the vitality that he nevertheless musters in order to engage the reader in a vision of the difficult and mysterious conditions of the quest for reality.

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn,* for example, is generally recognized to be a book about the split sensibility of Mark Twain himself, an expression of his conscious desires at odds with his private fears. The book is vital because Huck himself is so deeply rooted in the superstitions which he shared with the audience which was going to read his story. Yet Huck's attractive power, his social and religious savvy, his morality, and his rapport with nature, arise from the fact that he is an outsider, an alien, and feels innately guilty: hence his attraction to death, his tendency to change his name, to continually obliterate himself. A great deal of his appeal resides in the fact that he is finally without any direct power. His moral sensitivity is deep, his pastoral descriptions most moving, but the last eight chapters of the book are influenced neither by Huck's moral imagination nor by the natural forces with which he associates himself. They are shaped rather by Huck's alter ego, Tom Sawyer, who represents another side of Twain's own sensibility.

The characterization of Tom, with his secure middle-class roots, his talent for performance, his intuition of lines of power and forms of adult manipulation, his misuse of the imagination, demonstrates the strain on the writer's judgment in a world made complex by the disappearance of a relatively stable religious vision and the incursion of industrial forces. For Tom Sawyer has a predilection for incredible and superfluous danger, a kind of madness of invention that thrives on pointless power and irrelevant activity; he has no qualms about violence, and there is in his character a complete absence of moral vision. Huck's vitality, finally, is that he can see Tom's madness; but that Huck has no other power is an indication of Twain's dilemma as a realist.

As the author's persona, Huck is always in love with Tom and, in fact, finds his salvation in Tom. He can see Tom for what he is, but cannot stop

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him nor keep himself from helping Tom. While he is above him in moral intelligence, he remains his accomplice in action. When, for example, Huck enters the Phelps's farmyard without any notion of how to proceed, he hears the spinning wheel of his fate and trusts to "providence"; providence turns him temporarily into Tom Sawyer, and Huck says, "It was like being born again, I was so glad to find out who I was." Huck knows that Tom's way of life is rotten, that his vision of reality is demented: when Tom accomplishes his "adventure" so well that he gets wounded, Huck can say wryly, "He had a dream and it shot him." But Huck sees no alternatives, even while he recognizes that Tom's way is killing to the spirit. Thus as we draw back from the spectacle of the conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn,* we begin to see that as wise little Huck floated down the river trusting to fate, luck, and nature, he was trusting to the debris of an old religious impulse that no longer connected to any potent reality.

By the end of the book, Huck realizes that his moral efforts (as, for example, when he "saves" Jim only to find that Jim was already freed) were a waste of time. In the final paragraph, he can only say:

> Tom's most well now, and got his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch, and is always seeing what time it is, and so there ain't nothing more to write about....

The replacement of the timepiece by a bullet is an exchange which is emblematic of the deadly meaning of passing time. But since Tom is oblivious to both emblems, there is little more that Huck can do or say. Twain, confused and attracted by the power Tom represents, can only bring the book to a conclusion by having Huck beg off and back out. The reader senses that Twain is compromised: his most moral impulses are embodied in Huck but thwarted by the mad energy embodied in Tom. As there is no future in Huck's world, we realize that the mystery which once inhabited that world has now shifted to Tom's. And the reader suspects that as a consequence of this shift Twain himself feels fooled, and guilty, and a little helpless.

But in the work of that most typical realist, William Dean Howells, the conflict between the public assertions and private intuition is more upsetting and irritating, because Howells found in his professed ideal of realism a mode he felt was adequate to this conflict. Yet the steadiness with which he pursues that mode actually seems a kind of perversity. I say this because Howells, in the cause of an ideal he forged with honorable effort, seems ready to bend or break the human characters he uses to exemplify it.

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There is a deep split between Howells's conscious goals and his subconscious impulse. For all his best intentions, Howells's vision of reality is sadistic. It punishes the reader, as its long-standing reputation for drabness makes clear, and even more it punishes those characters with whom both reader and writer should identify.

In his best known novel, *The Rise of Silas Lapham,* Howells does not quite advocate the enduring appreciation of "tasteless" or "sordid" things, but he does say that we must tolerate much in the novel that is "not amusing." During table conversation at a Beacon Hill dinner party the author's views on realistic fiction are voiced through the Reverend Sewall, a man who functions as the moral touchstone and observer throughout the book. And even if we allow for some lightly ironic distance between Howells himself and his mouthpiece, there is something so rigorous about Sewall's notions that they grate:

> The novels might be the greatest possible help to us if they painted life as it is, and human feelings in their true proportion and relation but for the most part they have been and are altogether noxious.

To this someone responds, "But what if life as it is isn't amusing? Aren't we to be amused?" "Not to our hurt," is the answer. What Howells advocates, through Sewall, is a vision of human life that adequately describes the quality of daily life: a vision that interprets the meaning of suffering and remains fundamentally optimistic about the commonplace activity of life, activity marked by "that light, impalpable aerial essence which they've never got into their books yet." The novelist who could interpret these common feelings of commonplace people would have, says the Reverend, "the riddle of the painful earth" on his tongue. But as these matters are not to be "amusing" to our hurt the reader is forced to entertain himself by continually acknowledging that even tasteless and embarrassing characters can exemplify a moral ideal.

Indeed, characters seem punished in Howells's work precisely because they are made first and foremost to exemplify an ideal. If the illusion of reality is created in Howells's characterization, if we believe as we read the novel that Silas Lapham is a person, we feel in conclusion that his life has been rounded off rather definitively, pared down according to a particular idealized notion. Not that the particular ideal of realism which Howells enforces on the reader is one that he takes lightly: it is composed of a very fine balance of the good, the beautiful, the very honorable, and the bad, the tasteless, and the lugubrious. In his rigorous attempt to be fair to reality, to

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admit to all the awkward and difficult moments that occur in real life in order that his vision will be valid and persuasive, Howells makes us see much about Silas Lapham that we might not want to.

Thus, while the Reverend Sewall is holding forth with an account of Howells's critical notions, Lapham is, unawares, getting drunk. First he behaves badly, then embarrassingly, then terribly. And if he also behaves honorably at other times, and if we come to have a rich sense of Lapham's character, these moments and qualities still seem fastened together for ends beyond the realistic portrayal of Silas Lapham. When all is said and done, the author is too far away from this character; he has turned him into an object in a moral allegory. And in the end, Lapham, who begins the book a millionaire and "rises" because he remains moral in the face of temptations associated with the loss of his wealth, has little idea of what happened to him, what the point of it all was. When Sewall, who drops by at the conclusion to see how Lapham is doing in his new poverty, asks Lapham "Do you have any regrets?"Lapham replies,

> "About what I done? Well, it don't always seem as if I done it...Seems sometimes as if it was a hole opened for me, and I crept out of it...I don't know as I should always say it paid; but if I done it, and the thing was to do over again, right in the same way, I guess I should have to do it."

Thus, with his simplicity, his good will, it seems as if he has been used.Although Howells did not intend for it to seem this way, Sewall very simply condescends to Lapham in this final scene. For instead of visiting Lapham out of love or care, "Sewall was intensely interested in the *moral spectacle* which Lapham presented under his changed conditions." (my emphasis)

The problem with Howells's realism is that although he was intelligent in his consideration of the problems of society as they can to his attention and the problems of literature as they came across his desk, he had a preordained notion that chilled life in his art. At the end of his novel, his exemplary character, Silas Lapham, is in little better shape than Huck. He is tired, shriven of pride and position, leveled by fate and the forces of new money. Yet Howells expects the reader to focus upon the fact that Lapham retained an ideal of integrity. This is difficult, even ludicrous—not because Howells himself remained well-to-do, culturally influential, and safely established in the neighborhoods from which Lapham was expelled. We cannot so confuse life and art as to ask Howells to live by the model he

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describes in his novel. But Howells condescends to his main character and his condescension undermines the integrity of the idea he dramatizes. The concern for humanity is buried under the concern for ideas, and the suffocation is palpable in the work. The mystery of life, whether beneficent or malevolent, is sensed perhaps by Lapham, but never by the reader, who remains too aware of Howells's attempt to maintain control. Moreover, because Howells so adheres to his fixed vision and, unlike his friend Twain, cannot give imaginative energy to animate the vital and perverse force which animates a character like Sawyer, Howells's fiction is static. The conflict is not embodied in a vital character who lives on.

The obvious contrast here is the work of Dreiser, in which the creation of a more "real" picture of life results from an enthusiastic identification with the imaginative activity of the little man about whom he writes. In Dreiser's account of that activity, the real is forced out through the popular stereotype which the little man uses to envision his own life. In *An American Tragedy,* for example, the characters define themselves by constructing and living out a fiction about their identities, a creation parallel to Dreiser's act of writing the novel. The quest for reality, then, both in the minds of the characters and in the mind of the author creating those characters, is a function of the ongoing vitality of the imagination, a matter of finding an appropriate story. Although Dreiser has a reputation for naturalistic ideas, and scientific determinism, the sheer quantity of phenomena in his novel undermines such explanatory models. Instead, we are given fictions-within-fictions, accounts of people living out their delusions in a world of no clear order. We are given a sense of the vertigo produced in lives lived out as sheer imaginative constructions.

Clyde's lawyer, Jephson, is an example. As he reconstructs for the jury a narrative of Clyde's supposed motives, the man is motivated by his self-conscious adaptation of the role of "the country lawyer." With all of the craft that goes with that role, he takes the bits of information which Clyde can supply and through intuition fashions an account that will seem persuasive. But as he does so, we realize that his imaginative activity parallels Dreiser's process of thinking out his own authorial account of the original murder scene. Jephson's fiction-making within Dreiser's made fiction heightens the problem basic to the novel—the problem of what is "real." And since the two accounts are equally plausible, yet not the same, and it is very difficult to tell how they differ, the problem is increased further. For the difference is crucial; it might help to decide if or how Clyde was guilty.

Clyde's own attempt to discover what is real, what he did do, what he should have done, why he did what he did, and what is happening to him

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now are the concerns central to Dreiser's work. While Jephson's action mirrors the novelist's, Clyde's story embodies the yearning and bitterness of the novelist. When Clyde is electrocuted, he is not clearly repentant. More than anything else he is bitter at his inability to express himself, to clarify his frustration. He still feels entitled to that dream of life embodied in Sondra Finchley, while he is offered only death in Christ in its place. Indeed, it was rage at his inability to articulate his understanding that led him finally to hit Roberta Alden, the girl he made pregnant. And though it may be incautious to say so, Clyde's rage over the inability to clarify and communicate seems to partake of a novelist's rage at the difficulty of communicating. Accordingly, aware of Dreiser's empathy with Clyde, who feels unfair deprivation, unjust guilt, and an almost animal love of life, we can understand Dreiser's stimulus to create this monstrous melodrama.

The basic outline of Clyde's story is derived from the old religious tract depicting the fate of the good boy who leaves home and religion for the lure of the wide, bright world, meets evil women, seeks easy money, and falls. The particular shape of his dream, the fair rich Sondra who gives him all he wants and tells him that he deserves her and the lovely life she promises, is also a melodramatic item drawn from novel and society page. The ideal shape of all the characters' conceptions of themselves come from what we would now call the "media"—newspapers, religious pamphlets, sentimental novels. And Dreiser sees that for all the delusion involved in these shared melodramatic visions Clyde sees something real that he, Dreiser, wants as well. If Clyde's dream is deadly, if Sondra gives way to the electric chair, that is because the dream was too simple and incomplete. For Dreiser knows that there is something lovely and attractive there: he himself has felt it. Thus he magnifies and qualifies the melodramatic plot paradigm in order to see, to analyze, what is really there. His version attacks minutely and slowly the inadequate imaginative shapes of reality which occupy the minds of character and reader and replaces them with all of the texture of life he can amass.

But unlike Howells, Dreiser does not force his material to conform to a fixed idea. The fundamental quality and power of Dreiser's fiction lies in its openness to human experience. His explanations of cause and effect are patently incomplete, unable to contain the mass of phenomena he has chosen to include. The total effect of the work indicates that the writer's understanding of the story is never adequate. He seems humble in the face of the mass of his material, stares fascinated at the complication, the myriad shapes and textures, the possibilities for organization and the variety of explanations possible for what is organized. And his vision, though built around a great emphasis in which all smaller plots are subverted to pointless

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ends, still retains an almost romantic appeal: for all of the world that is still unaccounted for remains a field for imaginative play, for the discovery or creation of a more adequate and just, more beautiful and true, vision.

In Dreiser's fiction, characters pick up their ideal roles and begin to move around, to use their minds to propel themselves through the dark void left by religion and a lost idea of America. And although Dreiser moves with the burden of generations of inhibition, in his work the mind begins to play in its new wasteland. Indeed, *An American Tragedy,* with a vision of the electric chair at its core, succeeds in moving one so massively that, for all the blindness and loss it depicts, it seems a glorification of that dark void. The mystery of the emptiness itself draws the imagination on, making one turn from art to daily life and back again, thus corroborating the realistic method which itself turns back and forth from life to art with the sense that the two have equal weight.

Dreiser's example of openness and acquisitiveness and doggedness, the wild, nearly oblative involvement of the writer with life, represents the strongest example of the realist's open-ended method. It is a narrative mode which, in its attempt to create fiction that is both popular and moving, begins with the stories people believe about themselves and corrects them, conservatively, carefully, in light of knowledge gained from observation of the world itself, until the stories fall apart and the common-man protagonists and the writer are left in the void of daily life. As he puts down such a book, the reader is left with the feeling that he too is lost in a pointless fiction, that the palpable things of his real world, the characters, the plots, the scenery, are merely local material being endowed with the air of the period-piece by a pointless flow of time. Then the reader scrambles to assert his own story and make order, his own crude art, again.

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POEMS

Two Poems by Frank O'Hara

POEM DURING POULENC'S GLORIA

The sweet sounds of the Seine
drift slowly along inside my left shoulder blade
it is slightly like a stiff neck
only in the back
how strange! we don't know each other
what faintly purposeful motives lead
us to such odd ends
and that they are ends stops
what stops
nothing but a moment of thoughtful tranquillity
unless it's pleasant you hasten
I hasten
no
I did not say hello to you when you wanted me to deliberately
and you deliberately wanted me
not to
so you
could gracefully complain
which is again almost
the only graceful thing anyone could do
as you so well know
just as hurt is the only beautiful
now that we are grown up
but I don't find the rewards
actual as you do
only in thinking about it
I would rather know someone happy and vulgar

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but who could love
Manon more than Marlene Dietrich
for that matter, (first comma)
who could love me
more than you
though you are a mean almost (another almost)
vicious person
and I really beautiful beside you
if anyone knew you but me
you wouldn't be beautiful
if you hadn't read Proust
but I would
this poem
is called "a tantrum" by "the happy few" or will be
unless of course they are too few to know
this all seems spiritual to me
it must be against god, too (second comma)

6 July 1961

SHE, HAS SHE BATHED IN SOUND

She, has she bathed in sound
as a cello opens itself to rain.
And manna falls on the sinner,
and snow falls on the starving.

With the savor of pain, she
has become a fountain. Poured
forth, as a virgin will love
and loving will move forward.

Draw, from this fountain, love
into your chambers. Not rejoicing,
but as wine is becoming to souls
and a window to life opens walls.

1956

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Robert Duncan

CIRCULATIONS OF THE SONG
AFTER JALĀL AL-DĪN RŪMĪ

*

If I do not know where He is
        He is in the very place of my not knowing.
If I do not know who He is
        He is the very person of my not knowing.
His is the Shining Forth I know not.
My heart leaps forward past knowing.

*

Would I prune back the overgrowth of yearning?
Free today from the shadows of what has been?
        Cut away the dead Love-Wood?
It is as if Christ-rood never perisht.
It is as if the God at Delphi still returnd.

Even now new shoots are returning toward Shrovetide,
fresh, tender. In the fullness of summer
        they too will be rampant.
A thousand roots of feeling tamper the ground
        for this abundance, this
spring water.
Ten thousand leaves of this green
work in the free-flow of the sun's light.

*

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Do you think I do not know what the curse of
darkness means? the power in confusion?
Do you think I do not remember
the tyranny of establisht religions,
the would-be annihilating cloud of lies
and the despairing solar malevolence
that is rumord to lie back of these?
the madness of Kings?

But now, in thought of Him, the Lord of Night
stirs with verges of a radiance
that is in truth dark, darkening glances of an obscurity
Love seeks in love, Eros-Oberon
whose Palace is Night. Did I tell you,
as I meant to, He is all about me?

It is as if Night itself
meant to cherish me.

*

The body of this thought must be a star.

This Mind is that fathomless darkness
racing out beyond itself, Time
pouring beyond time,
in the cast of whose scatterd sparklings,
seed drift of suns,
I am all water. I reflect
passages of what is moving as I catch it,
the shadow of the expanding depth,
the glance fugitive and sparkling
of but one among a million promises.

*

In this world without kings
secretly in every thing kings are preparing.
See! a single leaf the chance light enhances
is annointed and *commands* my regard;

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I am in the realm of this attention *subject*.
See! over there as if hidden an other leaf
    in obscurity as from the depth of its darkness
comes to light and therein sets up
    rule over my seeing;
all the mass of foliage I see are members now
    of this courting. I shall derive
where I am a court and pay court to this
    courtesy.

*

How happy I am in your care, my old companion of the way!
The long a-waiting, the sometimes bitter hope,
    have sweetend in these years of the faith you keep.
How completely I said "yes" when it came to me
and continue. Each morning awakening you set free
    another day for me. How has your face
aged over these years to keep company with mine?
Ever anew as I waken endearing. Each night
    in the exchange of touch and speech blessing.

Prepared throughout for rest. Is it not
as if He were almost here? As if we were
    already at rest?

*

The rest is an Artesian well, an underground fountain.
The level of the water is so close,
up-welling in every season, rising through me
the circuit Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī
in which at last! I come to read you, you
    come to be read by me. Releasing
freshets of feeling anew I come from.

*

But if you are the lover, how entirely you are He.
How entirely He is here; He commands me.

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A blazing star regent in the southern hemisphere
shines in my thought in the north
and I go forth to find rumors of him.
I am like a line cast out
    into a melodic unfolding beyond itself,
a mind hovering ecstatic
above a mouth in which the heart rises
    pouring itself into liquid and fiery speech
for the sake of a rime not yet arrived
    containing again and again resonant arrivals.

Fomalhaut, guardian splendor of the other "sky"—
in reflection my mind is crowded with splendors.

*

Are you my soul? my lover? my redeemer?
O no! My soul rushes forward to you!
And in the rushing is entirely given me anew.

*

The veil of speech I meant to be so frail I
    meant to be transparent that the light
    were you to read there would reveal me
throughout waiting, throughout about to be naked,
    throughout trembling has become a net
wrapping you round about in my words
    until I cannot see you.

    Now I would tear speech away.
I want you to find me out
with none of my leads in the way.
I want you to seek my being ready
    in your own way.

*

Because He was there where deep drunk I
    yet rememberd him—
because He was ever in the lure of the moment
    awaiting me—

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because *His* are the eyes of my seeing you—
yours was the mouth of the wish the tongue of my speech sought
that may never actually have been yours
was the sweet jet from sleep's loins
night stirrd to arousal
in the seed of the hour I came upon;
for the glorious tree of that long ago
acknowledged need
bursts into a like-sweet abundance of leaves,
as if from utter Being
risings of odors and savorings
feeding full the inner song in me.

*

Have we lived together so long, the
confluent streams of each his own life
into one lifetime "ours" flowing,
that I do not yet ever know the first
pang? the confused joyous rush
of coming to myself in you?
the leap at the brink of Being
left alone? the solitary on-going
before you? I am ever before you.
Even in the habit of our sweet marriage
of minds. Yet I am not
so sure of finding you
that I have no need for this
reassurance,
for the embrace of our two bodies,
for the entwining of bodies,
for the kiss, even as the first kiss,
for the memorial seal into silence the
lips bond,
the joyous imprint and signature of our
Being together one
in the immortal ellipse.

*

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For how entirely mortal is the Love I bear for you.
I bring it forward into the full fragrant
flare, the rosy effulgence of a perishing tree.
As in Oz or in fairyland, the fruits of that
arbor are ever changing.
All the flowering spectors of my childhood and manhood
come into and fade into that presence,
perilous throughout, essential throughout
—apple, cherry, plum—deep purple
as night and as sweet—quince and pear—
we know they are there all ready,
in each ring, each year
they belong to the tree's inner preparing.

For how entirely a door has been flung open in me
long prepared!
How each season of the year, a thief,
goes in and goes out,
bearing transgressions of tastes and odors,
traces of me lost,
imprints of thee, stolen hours,
stored among my secrets.

*

Stand by me, you wingd light and
dark ascendant!
Attend me, here, falling!

*

For I am falling out into that Nature of Me
that includes the Cosmos it believes in
as if It were the smallest thing, an all but invisible
seed in the cloud of these seeds scatterd,
ever emerging from belief beyond belief.

I shall never return into my Self;
that Self passes out of Eternity, incidental!

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He too seeks you out. He too
dreams of coming to this fugitive morning,
of finding His Self in a time so personal,
in this mere incident of my living,
it is lost in our coming into it.

*

Again you have instructed me to let go,
to hold to this falling, this letting
myself go.
I will succumb entirely to your intention.

Contend with me,
you demand. And I am surrounded by wingd
confusions. *He*
is everywhere, nowhere
now where I am.

In every irreality there is Promise.
But there
where I am not *He* really is.

In Whose Presence
it is as if I had a new name.

*

I am falling into an emptiness of Me.
Every horizon a brink of this emptying.
Walls of who I am falling into me.

How enormous to come into this need!
Let us not speak then of full filling.
In the wide Universe
emptying Itself into me, through me,
in the myriad of lights falling—
let us speak of the little area of light
this lamp casts.
Let us speak of what love there is.

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Let us speak of how these perishing
things
uphold me so that
I fall into place.

*

The child I was has been left behind.
Those who first loved me have gone on without me.
Where they were a door has been left open
upon a solitude.
In the midst of our revelry I find myself waiting.

Every day the sun returns to this place.
Time here advances toward another summer.
These fruits again darken; these new grapes
will be black and heavy hang from their bough;
the heat at noon deepens.

Sweet and pungent each moment ripens.
Every day the sun passes over this valley.
Lengthening shadows surround me.
All day I waited. I let the sun and shadows
pass over me.

Here a last clearing is left amidst shadows.
The darkest shadow falls from my pen as it writes.
In this farewell the sun pours over me
hot as noon at five o'clock.

But in Rūmīs text it is dawn. At last
he will come for me.
"He has climbed over the horizon like the sun,"
I read. Where have you gone?
"he is extinguishing the candles of the stars."

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Come quickly here where the sun is leaving me, Beloved,
for it is time to light the lovely candles again!

*

For a moment did beauty pass over my face?
I did not have to reach for *your* beauty.
Radiant, it entirely flowd out and thru me.

Were you talking? Were we discoursing
upon the mercurial Hermes?
The mysteries of quick-silver and the
alchemical gold,
the transports of beauty, dissolve themselves
and are nothing,
are resolved again, everything,
a wave of my own seeing you
in the rapture of this reading.

What were you saying?
An arrow from the shining covert of your gaze
pierced me. Molten informations of gold
flood into my heart,
arteries and veins, my blood
racing throughout with this news,
pulses in a thousand chemical
new centers of this learning.

*

How long ago I would have been the target!
every line of my young body alert to be drawn into your sight!
all of my youth was meant to be your target!

Now so late that my body
darkens and the gossip of years
goes on loosening the ties of

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my body, now so late that
the time of waiting itself looses
new pains in me, I hear
the sound of the bow-string.

    Swift, swift, how again
and again that arrow reaches me
    and fails to reach me!

*

How I long for the presence of your eyes,
for in your eyes gnostic revelations
    come to me, Hermes
darkens and quickens my speech.

I will take up geometry again.
The mysteries of here and there, above and below,
    now and then, demand new
figures of me. A serpent intuition
    flickers its tongue upon the air.

Mine now the quickening of that
shifting definition I am swaying in whose
    fascination suspended before striking
which now opens out radiant and singing petals from itself
    so that I am lost in its apparition,
distracted in this looking into the time-sway.

I am like a snake rising up in the
    mirage of the sun where
everything is swaying, to and fro,
    noon visual dancing and,
beyond my hearing, in seeing I over-hear
    the messengers of the sun buzzing, wingd.
I see and am held here in my seeing before striking
    the honeyd glow of the woodwind dance
    singing.

*

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In each House He has a different name,
In each He is expected again.

And I too change, but you in all
these years remain
true to me so that it most seems,
sweet constancy,
in you I have come true
and all the rest is range.

Then He is range. And from this household ours
Heaven is range. In the Grand Assemblage of Lives,
the Great Assembly-House
this Identity, this Ever-Presence, arranged
rank for rank, person for person, each from its own
sent out from where we were to another place.
now in the constant exchange

renderd true.

*

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Michael Rogin

THE ROMANCE OF THE SELF IN JACKSONIAN AMERICA

The image of a distinctive American identity is most pervasively embodied in the self-made man, born free of traditional restraints, who determines his own fate in the marketplace and the west. This American exceptionalism, to use the Marxian term Leo Marx has recently revived, has rather different histories in literature and political science. Political scientists have celebrated a politics of pragmatic individuals and pluralist groups. Literary critics, on the other hand, have distinguished the European novel, where character is formed amidst thick social relations, pervasive class distinctions, and inherited limitations, from the American romance, in which the individual alone in space encounters races not classes, declining families not powerful ones, and in which, in Richard Chase's words, "close involvement with real life" is abandoned for the melodramatic "underside of consciousness." I want briefly to locate the self-made man in history, and then, using primarily literary materials, characterize his narcissistic romance.

The westward-aiming American individualist is not a timeless creation but a historical one, who emerges to define American identity in the Jacksonian period. This self-made image takes shape, consciously and unconsciously, against three alternative American images of the antebellum period. These are, first, the eighteenth-century, household society of the fathers, organized around families for production and limited exchange, governed by the leading families, limited to the eastern seaboard, and symbolized in the nineteenth century by the Adams'; second, the communal societies of Indian tribes, collectively owning the land, living on the frontier, imprisoned both by the traditions of their fathers and their closeness to nature, and symbolized in Francis Parkman's words, as "the child who will not be weaned from the breast of his rugged mother"; and third, coming into focus at the end of the Jacksonian period, the slave society of the south, where family loyalty, aristocratic hierarchy, and slave

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labor denied the free man his "equal privileges in the race of life."

Blocking free labor's westward expansion, the slave south brought the age of Jackson to an end and generated Civil War. The country which sought "a new birth of freedom" in Civil War had first gained its identity as a nation of self-made men on the frontier. Indians and the west, as I have recently argued in *Fathers and Children,* gave birth to the age of Jackson. With the primitive accumulation of Indian land and the creation of a national market, a commodity capitalism of individuals replaced the eighteenth-century family-based order. Westward expansion did not merely sustain the material basis of commodity capitalism; it spiritualized it as well. The dispossession of Indians created self-made heroes who gained authority by acquiring Indian natural power, and conquering the regressive temptations these "children of nature" posed. Fears of primitive dependence, laziness, violence, anarchic freedom, and community, although perhaps logically incompatible, joined each other as psychological threats to the hermetically-sealed, independent, liberal self. Attacking communal and familial loyalties, Indian policy-markers liberated individual Indians from nature and the tribe, and so freed them for the marketplace. The archetype of the self-made hero, making himself in Indian combat and then becoming their "benefactor," was Andrew Jackson.

Family integrated the individual into household order, slave society, and tribe. Market capitalism bifurcated a conjugal family based on love from a competitive, unstable, exteriorized marketplace, and the self-made ideal sought to fill the newly opened space. The myth of self-sufficiency appealed to a society of independent small-holders, who still owned their own productive property. At the same time, obscuring the emerging dependence on market, factory, and mass public, the myth solaced a self buffeted and alone in the crowd.

Individualism promised liberation not only from exterior social relations but from interior familial ties. Fornication, prostitution, and adultery—the adult, interpersonal transgressions—were the eighteenth-century targets of moral criticism. The nineteenth century discovered masturbation. Sexual purity writers, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has shown, ignored active sexuality for this secret, private vice. Self-abuse was the archetypical nineteenth-century sin; self-control and self-production its virtues. The self-made man, if we take the phrase literally, had created himself, without father or mother. He was, as has been said of Leatherstocking, a hermaphrodite. I want to locate the Adamic American innocent not so much outside society in general as in flight from sexuality and the family in particular.

The spreading marketplace, for Whigs and Jacksonians alike, under-

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mined the power of the fathers. It was not simply that leading family patriarchs were in decline. Fathers up and down the unstable social scale, tempted by the "mammon" of acquisition, were no longer the repositories of virtue. These problematic fathers appear in different forms throughout antebellum culture. In the best-selling temperance novel, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room,* for example, "the predominating sensuality" of every single father has endangered his family. The fathers are marked by their "gross sensual expressions...particularly around the mouth"; these mouths fasten on the glass and the bottle. Either the father himself or his son has deserted the family for the alternative, all male family of the inn. The greed-ridden fathers appear strong; in fact they are weak. They lose control of their sons to "the monster intemperance" and the book climaxes with a "parricide."

With father's virtue held hostage in the marketplace, mother became the repository of morality. The mothers in *Ten Nights* all embody virtue. They are powerless, to be sure, against the "eating cancer" of drink, but their weakness, so closely tied to their purity, is only one side of the problem. Maternal dependence, as the image of the bottle suggests, is no more acceptable than amoral, marketplace freedom. Maternal bonds threatened not merely the son's independence, but as Christopher Lasch has recently shown, his sexual identity as well. The nineteenth-century conjugal family was losing central social and productive relations. The urban father usually worked in a mysterious world away from home; even if he did not, the forces impinging on his working world were removed and impersonal. Natural affection rather than social function, wrote Tocqueville, characterized the ties between parent and child. But natural affection in a withdrawn family intensified claustrophobic, libidinal ties. Sentimental novels like *Ten Nights* spiritualized incestuous temptations, and consummated them (once for father and daughter in *Ten Nights,* once for mother and son) in the child's death. When Melville's *Pierre* exposed the incestuous roots of familial loves and *liebestodten,* he tore the veil off mysteries, the *American Whig Review* charged, that should forever be "shrouded in decorous darkness," and struck "with an impious hand, at the very foundations of society." Melville was accused of exposure, not calumny. The self-made man had to free himself not only from weakened fathers but from loving mothers as well.

The Jacksonian individual escaped his problematic parents by becoming both father and mother of himself. As father, he slayed maternal images of luxury, materialism, dependence, and sensuality. The "monster intemperance," like Masonic conspiracies and Popish plots, appeared at the fringes of antebellum politics; four monsters progressively defined its center. These were the bloodthirsty Indian "children of nature"; "the old

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mother," "monster hydra" Bank, which "devoured" the western cities in its "jaws"; the "sea-Leviathan" England, conspiring with Indians in 1812 and with antislavery Mexico in 1844; and the slave power conspiracy. To cite just one illustration, the "many-headed Hydra" Bank, in one anti-Bank cartoon, resembles a Medusa head. Each snake-like tentacle represents a minion of the Bank, and "the old Hero" Jackson stands ready to sever them all.

As the picture of Jackson suggests, there are two sorts of Jacksonian individuals: the mass of anonymous selves, who are to benefit neither from family tradition nor special privilege; and the hero who rises to slay demons which threaten them. Establishing authority over himself, the hero—as Indian fighter, slave owner, textile manufacturer, President—also establishes paternity over soldier, Indian, or slave children, over textile mill girls, and even over the nation of free white men as a whole.

The self-made man had to face the achievements of founding fathers as well as the weaknesses of fathers closer to home. The founding document of transcendental culture, Emerson's *Nature,* begins, "Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers." Emersonian nature sought to free men from "the dry bones of the past," the bones of that "father now in his grave," to whom Parson Weems, in his influential *Life of Washington,* demanded obedience. In politics, however, the self-made man used nature not to challenge the dead founding fathers but to match their achievements and reconstitute their world. Parricide was danger, not acknowledged goal, in antebellum society. So Lincoln reaffirmed his kinship with "the fathers'" Declaration of Independence on the free soil, literally a self-sustaining principle that "as each man has one mouth to be fed, and one pair of hands to furnish food...that particular pair of hands should feed that particular mouth." That Jackson's western refounding advanced commodity capitalism, and Lincoln's led to Civil War, has something to do not only with the forces at work within society, but within the self-made hero as well.

The self-made man established paternity over the world; he also dreamed of giving birth to it. The exponents of Quentin Anderson's "Imperial self," and the antiinstitutional reformers Stanley Elkins, George Fredrickson, and John Thomas have described, generated from personal self an ideal world freed from historical, institutional, and inter-human limits. As in the attack on fathers, Emerson's *Nature* sounds the narcissist imperium. His transparent eyeball first merges with nature; then "the solid seeming block of matter" is "pervaded and dissolved" by "thought," and "my beautiful mother" is reborn from the regenerated self. What is the relationship between monsters slain to achieve paternity, and a world

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generated parthenogenetically from the imperial self?

A self in flight from sex and society lacks social explanations for evil and room for sin. Confronted with forces out of control, in self and in parental and social intercourse, it gives birth to what the science fiction classic *Forbidden Planet* called "monsters from the id." The monsters slain by the self-made hero seem to come from without and take possession of the self. In fact they are his own offspring.

"Among democratic nations," wrote Tocqueville, "the sources of poetry are grand, but not abundant. They are soon exhausted; and poets, not finding the elements of the ideal in what is real and true, abandon them entirely and create monsters....I fear that the productions of democratic poets may often be surcharged with immense and incoherent imagery, with exaggerated descriptions and strange creations; and that their fantastic brain-children may sometimes make us regret the world of reality."

The heroes of American art surely created monsters. Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* proclaimed itself the first American novel to turn from European material to "the field of investigation opened to us by our own country." Brown's sleep-walking protagonist, double of a man who has murdered his surrogate parents, discovers and slays Indian monsters in the wilderness. If *Edgar Huntly* first projected the American individual into the west, *Moby Dick* climaxed his history. And the thoughts of its hero, Melville tells "somnambulist" Ahab, "have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart forever; that vulture the very creature he creates."

The classic American literary monsters were not products of ungrounded artistic fancy. Melville formed Promethean Ahab and his Leviathan from the "real and true" major figures and symbols of antebellum politics, from Jackson and Calhoun, from the language of Bank War, slavery and antislavery, and expansion. His romance did not invent monomania; it rather illuminated its meaning—to choose only a single theme, the meaning of Ahab's self-proclaimed repudiation of human maternity and paternity.

If the self-made man generated his monster alter-ego, then his self was a divided self. Divisions which fled from sex and society were reborn within. The splintering of the father's household world bifurcating marketplace and family, divided the acquisitive, worldly, outer personality from the secret self within. In David Bryan Davis's formulation, so heavily indebted to Melville, mobile men lacking rooted, authenticating credentials staged a smiling presentation of self in the marketplace. Their efforts to win the confidence of others for their own self-aggrandizing schemes created a crisis of confidence—Laing's ontological anxiety. Men themselves

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heavily implicated in the game of appearances sought to strike through the masks and expose the secret purposes hidden within. They sought as well the authentic, natural hero, whose appearance was at one with his inner self, and who would slay conspiratorial demons. Killing the Indian, Bank, or slave-power monsters healed the divisions in the self-made man, and reanimated his world.

An analysis like the one offered here uses the methods of the romance to examine the meaning of Jacksonian individualism. Generating monsters from within the self, it may seem to share the very antebellum blindness to social mediation it seeks to analyze. The Bank and the slave power had real existence after all, if the Mexican-English abolitionist conspiracy did not. Indians also were not creations of the romantic self. But the Indian monster so important in white American politics was. He was, in Roy Harvey Pearce's words, "no Indian but an image....Civilization had created a savage, so to kill him. Idea had begotten image, so to kill it. The need was to go beyond image and idea to the man." With the other images as well, pointing to a referent does not replace analysis of its meaning. One must ask whether the symbols mystified or illuminated social relationships, whether they advanced or retarded self-knowledge.

Let me illustrate with a final example. Those who celebrated "practical mechanics," in Daniel Webster's phrase, may appear to have been comfortable with appearance, and to have avoided demonology. Perhaps here are the protagonists of pragmatic political science. But monster-building defined work-a-day enterprise as well. It is a short step from organic parthenogenesis to reproduction by (Webster again) "scientific art." American idealists, D.H. Lawrence pointed out, are idealists of the machine. Machines replaced the human dependence and interdependence so problematic for the self-made man. The "foundling" hero of Melville's "Belltower" is a "common sense practical materialist." This "Prometheus" invents a human automaton, a "metallic agent" with "the appearance of intelligence and will." The "iron slave," created to strike the hours, strikes dead his creator instead. Melville had read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* that fable of the "modern Prometheus," whose hero, in explicit flight from parental sexuality, created his own child-monster. But Melville did not have to go abroad for models. Daniel Webster had already proclaimed a paradise of machines, "millions of automatic laborers, all diligently employed for the benefit of man." "The world is precisely as much benefitted," Webster explained, "as if Providence had provided for our use millions of men, like ourselves in external appearance, who would work and labor and toil, and who yet required for their own subsistence neither shelter, nor food, nor clothing. These automata in the factories and the

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workshops are as much our fellow laborers, as if they were automata wrought by some Maelzel in the form of men, and made capable of walking, moving, and working, of felling the forest or cultivating the fields."

Labor, Webster agreed, was the source of value. But, dilating on the advantages of man's "non-consumer," mechanical "fellow-laborer," Webster expanded value-creating labor to include "the labor of the ox, and the horse," and the machine. Obscuring the distinctive character of human production, he rationalized the rise of the factory system and the sale of alienated labor power on which it depended. Creating automata in the image of laboring men, Webster turned men into machines. His politics too, Thoreau charged, eliminated human responsibility. American industry "can make a man with its black arts," wrote Thoreau, sufficient for the "funeral" tasks of political obedience. "Wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well."

The machines of the practical materialist, touted as undemanding servants of the self-made man, actually sanctified hierarchy. The romantic, monster-slaying hero did so as well. A mass of equal individuals, lacking special human bonds to one another, were united by their allegiance to the leader. Imprisoned in market and factory relations, they experienced the hero's achievements vicariously. In these ways, as in others, the self-made image helped turn America away from class and class conflict, and toward hierarchy and mass.

This sanctification of hierarchy, under conditions of Civil War and industrializing capitalism, was, as Eric Foner and George Fredrickson have shown, the legacy of the self-made ideal. Its largely false promises of independence and mobility located blame for failure finally in the self, not in society. "If any continue through life in the condition of the hired laborer," said Lincoln, "it is not the fault of the system, but because of either a dependent nature which prefers it, or improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune." Moreover, it was all too easy for the antiinstitutional urge to transform itself into an institutional apotheosis which paralyzed individual will. Failing to generate a world congenial to autarchic fantasies, the antiinstitutional reformer absorbed himself into a resanctified state instead. He replaced the imperial self with institutional aggrandizement.

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WRITERS FOR CARTER

The following is a list of people who agreed to join a writers' committee for Carter, organized by William Phillips and George Plimpton. Unfortunately, the Democratic National Committee did not have any funds for the usual advertisement listing the names in the New York Times. We are now publishing these names for the record. In addition, we have asked all those who signed to write a few words about what they feel are the main problems facing the new administration, and we are printing here the responses received in time for this issue.

Woody Allen
Cleveland Amory
Michael Arlen
John Ashbery
Daniel Bell
Peter Benchley
Norman Birnbaum
Michael Braude
Harold Brodkey
Robert Brustein
John Cheever
Eleanor Clark
Robert Coles
Paul Cowan
Midge Decter
Benjamin De Mott
James Dickey
Joan Didion
Martin Duberman
John Gregory Dunne
Jules Feiffer
John K. Galbraith
Brendan Gill
Penelope Gilliatt
Richard Gilman
Francine du Plessix Gray
Elizabeth Hardwick
Michael Harrington
John Hawkes
Joseph Heller
Lillian Hellman
John Hersey
John Hollander
Maureen Howard
Richard Howard
Irving Howe
Elizabeth Janeway
James Jones
Carolyn Kizer
Alfred Kazin
Christopher Lasch
Arthur Laurents
John Leonard
Seymour Martin Lipset
Alan Lomax
Alison Lurie

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Dwight MacDonald
Peter Maas
Norman Mailer
Bernard Malamud
Marya Mannes
Steven Marcus
Peter Matthiessen
Margaret Mead
Leonard Michaels
Hans Morgenthau
William Phillips
George Plimpton
Richard Poirier
Ishmael Reed
Harold Rosenberg
Philip Roth
Raymond Rubinow
Richard Sennett
Arthur Schlesinger
Wilfred Sheed
Susan Sontag
Saul Steinberg
Gloria Steinem
Peter Stone
William Styron
Ronald Sukenick
Mae Natalie Tabak
Gay Talese
Robert Penn Warren
Tennessee Williams

ROBERT BRUSTEIN

Carter's slim margin of victory after a large early lead in the polls indicates some of the skepticism with which he is currently regarded, even by many who voted for him. This in turn suggests what will be one of the greatest tasks facing him during his first administration: namely, an effort to restore our faith in the public life and in those who now pursue it. This is not so much a social or political matter as a moral imperative, but it is unlikely that any bread and butter issues will be satisfactorily resolved until Carter can convince the electorate, along with the Congress, that he actually possesses the qualities of character to which he lays claim. Americans, particularly young Americans, cannot absorb many more shocks about their leaders without falling entirely into a ferocious cynicism. By now, the Camelot varnish has completely flaked off the Kennedy years, Johnson is remembered primarily for a Vietnam scar on his belly, and large numbers of the young have no experience of government apart from the sinister skulduggery of the Nixon administration and the thickskinned thickheadedness of Ford.

Carter has an obligation, therefore, to reestablish some of our vanished faith in the Presidency as a meaningful institution and in the

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President as an honest, compassionate human being. Only by developing into an exemplary model, will he be able to exercise power effectively, and attract people into the public life who now feel they would be permanently stained by it. I write two weeks before the Inauguration, when the only evidence we have with which to evaluate Carter's performance are his campaign and his Cabinet appointments. Neither have proved very promising, but one must refrain from reading the future on the basis of a few damp tea leaves.

HANS J. MORGENTHAU

In the most general terms, the new administration faces the problem of bringing traditional policies, institutions, and procedures into harmony with the facts of contemporary life. In both domestic and foreign policies we start from assumptions which are reflections of a reality which existed, say, a century ago, but has disappeared or at least been drastically changed in consequence of the social and technological developments of the contemporary world.

There exists, then, a gap between our assumptions about the social world in which we live and the actual nature of that world. If we want to escape catastrophe, coming about through abuse of the natural environment, mismanagement of society, or nuclear war, our government must eliminate, or at least narrow, that gap.

This seems to me to be the fundamental general task of the new administration, from which specific policies and procedures must derive.

MAUREEN HOWARD

There is a grave crisis in our democracy: through an institutionalizing of the poor this country is being robbed of the educated electorate upon which our democratic system is built. It is to the advantage of big business, big labor, and the military-industrial complex to keep the poor semi-literate and under the spell of mass media. Jimmy Carter is honest in claiming that he cares about the people. Our best hope lies in the presumption that the kindly and reasonable father figure that appealed to many voters will give full rein to Carter, the super-executive and administrator. We need education and practical social programs, not rhetorical visions. Of immediate importance, it would seem that the administration must establish an independence from the tyranny of the Pentagon, for the success of The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks depend on a position of moral

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authority free of such pressure.

During the preinnaugural weeks Mr. Carter has proved himself a serious student of the economy. If the economy does improve through tax reform and an increase in jobs we will have need of a teacher, a voice to demonstrate that a slower rate of development, a leveling off, is not a national disaster. One of the lessons of Watergate must surely be that the truth is more acceptable than nursing a neurotic fear of failure.

ROBERT COLES

One hopes that Mr. Carter, once settled into office, will try to live up to that word "populist" he kept using to describe himself when running for the Presidency; live up to the historical sense of the word — not turn it into yet another of those political evasions we have learned to expect from just about all candidates. The populists questioned American capitalism earnestly, thoroughly, without fear. They were black and white, Northern and Southern, farm people and city people — the so-called working class. For a brief, luminous moment they asked who owns what and why; and aimed to further a localist kind of social and economic justice as a necessary addition to the Jeffersonian political tradition. They distrusted not only big business, but big government. Many of their early jeremiads prophesy our present condition — the power of the "military industrial complex" over our national life. Will the self-described south Georgia "populist" stand up and take on that "complex"? I doubt it. But the problems that "complex" presents at home and abroad, are the really important ones — and they will test Jimmy Carter every day, starting late January of 1977.

RONALD SUKENICK

Every administration has an important effect on culture, an effect that may in the long run be as important as some of the more obvious policy stances it takes. As the federal government gets increasingly into badly needed funding of the arts and humanities, it also increases its potential to do massive damage to the culture. Federal arts and humanities programs are currently too bureaucratic, too centralized, and too unresponsive to the cultural communities they serve. In particular, the relation of government and the arts has become a significant civil liberties issue. If the present trend toward bureaucratic control continues, we will soon have a situation in which a few government functionaries will be in a position to tailor the entire noncommercial art establishment in a way more subtle and far more effective than attempts at direct censorship. The Carter administration

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should be made aware of these matters and move to correct them. The government should foster and help sustain artist created and controlled institutions to channel government money, and to ensure that government money does not mean government control. Otherwise, the experiment of government funding of the arts may become a major cultural disaster.

ARTHUR LAURENTS

The problem facing the Carter Administration is the usual: active recognition of the moral issues in a changing world versus political expediency leading to capitulation to the conglomerate-military complex. Example: safeguards in nuclear plants (as well as an end to the missile race) while developing an energy program.

RAYMOND S. RUBINOW

With the advent of the Carter Administration, concerned citizens will hope for the beginning of a long overdue breakthrough in the world's closing nuclear vise.

A leading expert, Professor Richard A. Falk of Princeton, sums up the dismal prospect as follows:

1. by 1985, fifty countries will have nuclear plutonium-producing capacity;
2. arms control experts agree that *if present tends continue,* there will be atomic war by year 2000;
3. it is too late to talk about "curbing" nuclear *proliferation;* civilian and military *denuclearization* is called for;
4. in the recent campaign both candidates based their statements on the common assumption of the continued use of the nuclear deterrent as an instrument of foreign policy.

Query: Can President Carter, the nuclear engineer, reexamine his views and give strong leadership to *reversing* present trends?

MARYA MANNES

When I got his first flyer over a year ago from "the man nobody knew," Jimmy Carter, I said to myself: *this* is the man America needs. I had a sudden feeling of great relief as I looked at his face. I remembered having

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read among other things that he had studied physics. Most of our presidents have been lawyers, and I felt that in Carter there was an unusual combination of strength and flexibility, of honesty and independence.

These feelings were very much enhanced by a small private meeting in New York where a handful of people and his New York committee were free to talk back and forth. Hearing Carter talk strengthened my previous estimation.

Perhaps nobody could solve the appalling issues before us whether they concern education, crime, welfare, or international relations, but Carter's impetus might break through these vast obstructions and at least define a pattern of hope and action.

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The editors of Partisan Review wish to repudiate certain statements made by Robert Boyers in his article "A Case Against Feminist Criticism" which appeared in Volume XLIII, #4. Referring to Joan Mellen's book, WOMEN AND THEIR SEXUALITY IN THE NEW FILM, the article states "each page contains errors and misleading statements." This statement by Mr. Boyers is of course untrue on its face. The article then goes on to refer to "deliberate falsifications," which are said to be contained in the book and purports to give examples. The examples given are in no sense "deliberate falsifications," and the editors do not believe that anything else in the book would justify such a statement.

Mr. Boyers is of course free to express his critical judgment of Ms. Mellen's book and Ms. Mellen's views. Our repudiation has to do with the statements quoted above, and we regret their appearance in Partisan Review.

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Peter Shaw

EZRA POUND ON AMERICAN HISTORY

The longest and most obscure section of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* has until recently been all but ignored. His ten cantos devoted to John Adams, when they are discussed, are described by Poundians as an extreme but viable example of Pound's poetic method. Old fashioned readers, argue the Poundians, are put off by chronological discontinuities and by apparently obscure passages, but these fall into place in the harmonious design of the whole work. This defense at once invokes the authority of Pound's private terms for modernist poetics—vortex, ideogram, paideuma—and asserts that he has written nothing but what can be understood with care by an intelligent general reader. But aside from such generalizations, since publication of the Adams cantos in 1940 no more than six out of their twenty-five hundred lines have been explicated, and these incorrectly. The case presents a challenge not only to the reputations of Pound and his followers, but also to some of the cherished dogmas of modernism.

The modernist movement came in two waves. The first, between about 1900 and 1910, brought new modes of expression in painting and literature. In the early 1920s the new movements—symbolism, cubism, imagism—found their perfect expressions in two works on the literary side: T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland,* and James Joyce's *Ulysses.* Both appeared in 1922, soon after Pound's "Mauberley" and his first cantos. Then, after the apotheosis of 1922, and while the pioneering works were still being absorbed and made influential, their authors withdrew from the battle of modernism in order to write at greater length in the idiom they had established. This second wave of modernism saw the awed reception of works in progress by the masters as they appeared over the next twenty years. One could not hope to grasp all of the complexities until these works appeared complete, and even then it promised to take years of explication before critical evaluation could begin. In the meantime, the point was not to criticize but to attempt to understand. In 1940, a year after *Finnegans Wake,* there appeared "East Coker," Eliot's second Quartet, and Cantos 52

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to 71—the Chinese history and John Adams cantos. Both Eliot and Pound continued not so much to be reviewed as ushered into the tradition. The triumph of modernist principles had insured such a reception despite, or rather because of the difficulty of their works: The *Quartets* and *Cantos* promised, like *Finnegans Wake,* to reveal their meanings with time. Whatever the results of this attitude for other writers, in the case of Pound it served to obscure the nature of what he had written.

Randall Jarrell's review of the twenty cantos published in 1940 presents something of an exception. Jarrell declared that Pound had "deteriorated." *Cantos* LII-LXXI," he wrote, "contains the dullest and prosiest poetry that he has ever written. These Cantos are so bad that they would not seem his at all, if they were not so exactly like the very worst portions of the old ones." Years later Donald Davie, in his book *Ezra Pound, Poet As Sculptor (1964),* called the ten Chinese history cantos "pathological and sterile," and added: "The John Adams cantos...are composed in the same way as the Chinese History cantos that precede them." Jarrell, however, wrote that Pound showed "a fine feel for anecdotes that carry the quality of a person or an age" and Davie, though disappointed in the results, conceded that Pound was carrying forward his "poetic method." Significantly, neither of these fine poet-critics quoted so much as a line of the Adams cantos, or attempted to convey what he understood or felt about them.

Adams is the subject of Cantos 62 to 71. He is mentioned occasionally in later cantos, notably in 94, and appears in Cantos 31 to 33, which are mostly about Jefferson. In addition, Canto 34 is devoted to John Quincy Adams, his son. Together with Canto 37, on Martin Van Buren, 31-34 and 62-71 are known as the American history cantos. In 62-71 one is faced with eighty pages of unexplained prose quotations. These come from *The Works of John Adams,* and include passages from state papers, legal arguments, diplomatic correspondence, and political treatises. The selections have no apparent connection with the rest of the *Cantos*—not even the others on American history. The Adams cantos are not in verse (Jarrell wrote: "the versification of these cantos is interesting: there is none"), though they are printed as poetry. Frequently, it is true, lines are indented, giving a look of poetry to the page. And the most common device also has a poetic look: it is the overrun line in which the latter part of a long sentence spills onto a second line set at the right hand margin.

Comparison with Pound's source, *The Works of John Adams,* reveals that aside from rearrangement on the page, most changes by Pound involve words omitted, abbreviated, lengthened, misspelled, misunderstood, or put into slang. Pound's contributions are limited to occasional interpolated phrases, exclamations, and foreign language tags (the Chinese ideogram for

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"balance" appears several times, usually following John Adams's mention of either personal restraint or governmental balance of powers). However, many of the Latin tags are from Adams himself. In addition, Pound renders phrases in the ole Ez jargon of his letters. "Says" becomes "sez," "them" becomes "'em," "Dr. Franklin," "Doc Franklin," "soldiers," "sojers," and "navy," pointlessly, "navee." The "Johnnie Adams" of earlier cantos disappears, but Pound having learned that "Chas. H. Adams" is actually Charles *F.* Adams, takes to referring to the editor of the *Works* of John Adams as "Chawles Fwances." For the most part Pound's vulgarizations are identifiable as interpolations: "Philadelphy" and "Baastun," for example, are clearly private jokes, invariably repeated. Frequently, though, there is a misleading appearance of eighteenth-century diction having been reproduced, as in the cases of "Capn Preston" and "Lard Narf" (for Lord North), neither of which appears in the original. Similarly, Pound appears to reproduce the immediacy of old documents when he writes "N. York," "shd," "wd," "recd," or "Mr. A." None of these, though, is abbreviated in the original. When Pound writes, "Mr D (Deane's) recommendations," or "He (Jay) returned yesterday to N. York" he appears to clarify when actually he is obscuring the original. The first line he has copied reads simply, "by Mr. Deane's recommendation," ("not recommendations"), and the second reads "His Excellency, Governor Jay, returned yesterday to New York."

Pound's own writing, which amounts to a few single lines in each canto, may be classed as exclamatory interjection. The widely separated phrases of his own in the Adams cantos have the appearance and effect of marginal comments made by a solitary reader for his own satisfaction:

> sojers aiming??
> ...all bugwash
> Hutchinson sucking up to George IIIrd.
> Damn well right, Mr. Zubly.
> (leaving us no doubt Vergennes was a twister)
> (which seems fairly English)
> (question?)

In the same spirit, when copying a list of names Pound may add one of his own: "KUNG Zoroaster Socrates and Mahomet," or else indicate that he would wish to do so: "add Jay."

One can understand the reluctance of a Poundian to look at these cantos in detail. But it is surprising, even in view of their appearance under the protective cloak of modernism, to find that independent critics have

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treated them with respect for thirty-five years. The Poundians make no distinction between the Pound of the pre-1922 modernist period and the Pound of the *Cantos*, and little distinction between the early cantos and those written during the author's intellectual decline. Pound called the volume in which the Adams cantos appeared "my best book [of poetry]." Accordingly, Poundians are committed to justifying its place in the *Cantos* at large. More suprisingly, critics not ideologically committed to Pound have cooperated in this project. By according a misplaced respectability to a coterie following, they have let themselves be led into acquiescence in partisan accounts of the Adams cantos. In effect this has put them on the side of the claim that the *Cantos* as a whole is a unified work.

Significantly, even the Poundians express reservations about the Adams section before delivering their ritual praise for it—always without specific comment. Philip Pearlman finds a "general failure of these cantos to achieve poetic intensity." Necessarily, though, in a book subtitled "On the Unity of Ezra Pound's Cantos," he concludes that despite their faults "they do have an orderly structure." In *The Pound Era,* Hugh Kenner, the staunchest defender and only explicator of the Adams cantos, goes so far in the direction of criticism as to call them "ten Cantos of finely culled citations that are bracing but aesthetically dispersive."

Recently, though, a sourcebook, *John Adams Speaking: Pound's Sources For the Adams Cantos,* by Frederick K. Sanders, has rejected the mild reservations of other Poundians. Sanders claims to present "convincing evidence of the care with which the poet has selected and arranged his materials." Sanders has gone through the ten volumes of *The Works of John Adams* and located the passages from which Pound quotes; these, keyed by canto and line number, he has reprinted in a volume of over five hundred pages.

In a Prologue to this volume Carroll Terrell, managing editor of *Paideuma, a journal devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship,* writes:

> "The Adams Cantos" add up to a large vortex just as each of its several parts is a smaller vortex. The stunning result is the image of an Adams dramatically different from the image previously made by analytical historians.

Other Poundians have gone so far as to claim that Adams is the hero of the *Cantos.* Yet one searches in vain for a description of the character supposedly drawn by Pound. William Vasse concludes that "it is impossible to give a simple clue to the personality of John Adams...Pound does not attempt a

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simple explanation in the Adams Cantos, perferring complexity to pat generalization." Clark Emery in *Ideas Into Action: A Study of Pound's Cantos* explains: "The character of Adams emerges so clearly from these cantos that they do not need annotation to register an effect." So lucid are they in fact, that Emery does not find it necessary to make a single comment, offering instead a page of "excerpts selected at random from the Adams cantos." More accurately, though still respectful of the method, Donald Davie writes that "Pound's cuts and compressions and juxtapositions make a nonsensical hurly-burly of Adam's life." Equally unsubstantiated with the claim that Pound discovered a new John Adams is William Vasse's claim that in the Adams cantos and the other American history cantos "by selecting, remodeling, and editing his material... Pound recreates from historical documents a new interpretation of American history which is different from that of his sources, and much different from the 'standard' history book."

Pound wrote the American history cantos on Jefferson and Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Martin Van Buren between 1933 and 1935, and those on John Adams between 1937 and 1939. The latter group coincided with Pound's furthest remove from society, poetry, and humanism. In 1936 he began contributing to the *Fascist Quarterly*. By 1938, when most of the John Adams cantos were being written, Pound was an enthusiastic follower of Oswald Mosely, the English fascist, and of Benito Mussolini. His essays had become a jumble of fascism, anti-Semitism, and the economic theory of Major C.H. Douglas (whose initials Pound originally attached to C.F. Adams). By this time modern criticism had established the practice of separating the author from his work—an additional circumstance to help shield Pound from searching criticism. After all, one could argue, he had continued to write coherent poetry in the 1920s when already under the influence of Major Douglas. Critical theory seemed to dictate that his ideas, however abhorrent, be kept strictly out of the account.

While the critics were careful to maintain this separation, Pound made no attempt to keep his prejudices out of his poetry. His few interpolations among the quoted and paraphrased lines of the Adams cantos—perhaps less than ten per-cent of the whole—have largely to do with his personal obsessions. "Schicksal sagt der Fuhrer" (destiny says the Fuehrer), comments Pound after a line which transcribes John Adams's declaration of his trust in providence. And while Pound exhibits no attempt to search out Adams's economic ideas, he emphasizes those that he comes across by means of heavy, black lines or else with anti-Semitic interpolations. In the first Chinese history canto, quotations on money and the Jews falsely attributed to Adams and Franklin ("better keep out the jews") are under-

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scored by five of these lines. In the earlier American history cantos Pound emphasizes unconnected remarks about money by John Quincy Adams and Martin Van Buren, along with their few mentions of the Jews.

Poundian critics have raised questions about the relationship between the early American history cantos and the Adams cantos. Why do those on John Quincy Adams and Martin Van Buren (34 and 37), precede rather than follow the cantos on John Adams, who lived before them? And why does John Adams, who is much less important than Jefferson in 31 to 33, dominate 62 to 71 without reference to his earlier appearance? But these questions, we are told, will trouble only sensibilities trained in old-fashioned, chronologically arranged literature. Such readers are put in their literal-minded places through invocation of the ideogrammatic method, the vortex, or the promised revelation at the end of the *Cantos.* It seems never to occur to the continuing champions of these methods of modernism that their familiar litany is now seventy-five years old and that the sensibility which they present as embattled has been the accepted art language of the century for over fifty years. In any event, no advanced literary conceptions are required to explain the anomalous discontinuity between the John Adams of the early American history cantos and the John Adams of 62 to 71.

Pound, far from arranging and selecting from "historical documents" in the American history cantos, used a single book or set of books for each of them. In 31 to 33 he quoted from letters between Jefferson and Adams appearing in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson;* in 34 he quoted from a selected edition of John Quincy Adams's diary, and in 37 he used a volume containing Martin Van Buren's autobiography. These cantos were written in the early 1930s. Later Pound wrote that it took him seven years to find a set of John Adams's works in Europe. By 1938 he had that set, and he used it as his single source for cantos 62 to 71. If John Adams is dwarfed by Jefferson in 31-34, then, it is because Pound is quoting from Jefferson's works, which naturally contain more of Jefferson's letters than Adams's. Moreover, if Jefferson is forgotten in 62 through 71 it is because he was not prominently before Pound in his source, Adams's works.

Professor Hugh Kenner, the best known and most influential Poundian, established the terms of criticism for the Adams cantos in his *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1951). There he explained that these cantos are "an application to character of the method devised in *Mauberley* for rendering the sensibility of an age. If we read rapidly in search of a narrative we shall be very badly baffled indeed." Noel Stock in *Reading the Cantos* (1967) expresses some reservations about the Adams cantos but assures us: "there is never any doubt where we are, or what we are doing even when we may be

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ignorant of what Adams is talking about or the situation in which he is involved." Stock, following Kenner, quotes two passages without comment. The fact is that Kenner's commentary on the six lines comprised in these two passages amounts to the only specific explication given to the Adams cantos since their appearance. Kenner wrote as follows:

> When we read in Canto LXII,
>
> "Routledge was elegant
> 'said nothing not hackneyed six months before'
> wrote J.A. to his wife,"
>
> it is less important to know who Routledge was and what he talked about than to apprehend the quality and energy of John Adams' critical mind. Impatience of platitude and exact knowledge of what *was* hackneyed six months before are qualities sufficiently rare in statesmen to justify the chisel-cut effected by these lines.

Now let us see just what kinds of instruction in Adams's character, in American history, and in poetics the Poundians have imbibed from the Adams cantos. Line one: the characterization of Routledge—actually Edward *Rut*ledge—is not by Adams. Line two: "Said nothing not hackneyed six months before" does not refer to Rutledge. Line three: the quoted remark did not appear in a letter by Adams "to his wife." Three lines, three errors.

In the first line Adams is referring to the greatest speech of his career: that delivered on July 2, 1776 in defense of the Declaration of Independence. Self-deprecatingly, he wrote to his friend Samuel Chase that in this speech he had been neither eloquent nor original: he had merely summarized the six-month old hackneyed arguments in favor of Independence. In contrast, Rutledge of South Carolina was "described by Patrick Henry as the most elegant speaker in the first congress."

How can Pound, and in turn the Poundians, have so garbled this significant but easily grasped moment in American history? Did Pound experience difficulty in interpreting his "historical documents"? Not at all. For he was quoting entirely from volume I of the *Works of John Adams,* and this volume consists of a biography of Adams by his grandson, Charles Francis Adams. It is Charles Francis, in fact, who has quoted and "juxtaposed" Patrick Henry's observation on Rutledge with Adams's observation on his own speech in the letter to Chase. Only a man in a frenzy of solipsism could succeed in garbling Charles Francis Adams's straightforward presentation of this comparison. But to bestow on Pound's misquotation the dignity of calling it garbled would be to suggest that an intellectual

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process was going on where none is detectable. Pound simply copied words from the top of page 230 in the biography for his first line, others from the bottom of 231 for his second, and the mention of a letter from Adams to his wife from the top of the following page. The only detectable principle here is that of quoting from the tops and bottoms of succeeding pages. As for the Poundians, their failure to recognize the context makes it evident that their choice of an historically important quotation was coincidental.

But the confusions go still further. At first it appears that Pound has simply reversed the recipients of the two letters. Instead, he has done something more revealing of his state of mind in the Adams cantos. The last of the three lines quoted by Kenner and the one following it read as follows:

> wrote J.A. to his wife
> I said nothing etc. letter to Chase from John Adams

The reader naturally takes the second line as an introduction to the next quotation from Adams: the declaration of faith in providence to which Pound adds his quotation from Adolph Hitler. In fact it represents Pound's recognition that he had wrongly identified the first letter. He now indicates that the words "I said nothing etc" came from a "letter to Chase [not to his wife] from John Adams." Of course Pound could have clarified the identities of the recipients either by striking the line "wrote J.A. to his wife" or, since the succeeding mention of providence does appear in a letter to Adams's wife, by reversing this line with the one following. His failure to do either suggests a superstitious attachment to anything he had put on paper.

Whatever the explanation, the three lines in question are incoherent. As for the other three lines, which supposedly offer "an image of the quality of Adams' preceptions" and demonstrate the "superior immediacy" of Pound's "method," these involve equally embarrassing confusions on Kenner's part. Yet if Kenner has imbibed more misinformation about Adams and American history than the other Poundians it is because he has read the Adams cantos with more care than they. Thus his list of important figures in the *Cantos*—"the great Emperors, the brothers Adams, Jefferson, Odysseus..."—evidently derives from the misleading line, "But where the devil this brace of Adamses sprung from!" Out of context, as Pound quotes it, the phrase suggests two brothers, especially as Pound mentions "John's bro, the sheriff" in the first line of the same canto. But in fact neither of Adams's brothers achieved prominence. The brace of Adamses referred to is John and his cousin Samuel Adams, who appears frequently in the Adams cantos section but cannot be construed as one of its heroes. While one

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suspects the Poundians who follow Kenner of disingenuousness in avoiding comment on the Adams cantos, of Kenner it can at least be said that he truly believes in the coherence of Pound.

Kenner's misreadings tend to involve confusions about Charles Francis Adams. When one understands how Pound used Charles Francis's edition of *The Works of John Adams* the continuing high reputation of the history cantos becomes suspect in a different way. For, more remarkable than Kenner's original praise for the Adams cantos has been the persistence of others in honoring them—and this despite their lack of method having been revealed in 1955. In the *Pound Newsletter,* the precursor of *Paideuma,* William Vasse wrote,

> even when reworking the material to some extent [Pound] has remained faithful to the spirit of the original. ...except for a few editorial interpolations by Pound, it all does come from these works and is almost invariably arranged in the same chronological sequence as its source.

The familiar obscurity of Poundians on the cantos here serves the purpose of concealment. Vasse implies that Pound used numerous "works" at the same time as he reports that Pound used but a single "source," *The Works of John Adams.* Then at the end of his sentence he mutedly reveals the key to it all: the Adams cantos section is "almost invariably arranged in the same chronological sequence as its source." This means that Pound did *not* employ the devices of chronological time-shift and rearrangement that supposedly account for his obscurity.

The fact is that the shifts in chronology and point of view in the Adams cantos are the results of Pound's following the exact order of Charles Francis Adams's *Works.* In this edition, after the first, biographical volume by Charles Francis, succeeding volumes contain Adams's writings by type: diary and autobiography (combined to produce a continuous narrative), political writings, public letters, private letters. Pound went volume by volume, copying extracts as he turned the pages. Far from reordering the materials, with a few trifling exceptions he copied them in strict page order. The inevitable result of this slavish procedure is the confusing disarray of chronology and point of view that led to Kenner's misreadings. (In contrast, the earlier American history cantos do not employ the supposed method of chronological rearrangement because they follow works organized in chronological order.)

By starting with the first volume, the biography, one reads Adams's

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life as told by Charles Francis. One then goes on, beginning in the second volume, to a mixture of Adams's diary account with his autobiographical recollections; next to his early political essays and Revolutionary writings; and then to his late works on government. After these, one returns to the middle part of Adams's life as seen in his official correspondence. Finally, one goes over the same middle period in personal letters, which continue, through the tenth volume, into old age. Now, it might be argued that these materials appear in a fortuitous thematic arrangement. But Pound obscures even this by passing from one genre to another of Adams's writings without warning. He never indicates whether he is quoting from the biography, from letters by or to Adams, from contemporary diary impressions, or from the recollections of old age. In a rare instance of indicating a transition he supplies the word "dash":

> 88 battalions, September,
> dash had already formed lucrative connections in Paris

Here the first line comes from part one of Adams's Autobiography, which gives an account of the Continental Congress, and the second from part two of his Autobiography, in which he gives an account of his diplomatic service in Europe.

Elsewhere Pound goes from one volume to the next, and from diary to letters to quotations within quotations without so much as the cryptic word "dash." By failing to do any more than quote the lines as they come along he leaves behind an indistinguishable welter of points of view. In the case of Kenner's misreadings the point of view is that of Charles Francis Adams, not John Adams (Kenner believed that the Adams cantos were "taken from the correspondence of John Adams"). Charles Francis offers varying perspectives on Adams's career throughout the *Works,* quoting in footnotes Adams himself, contemporaries, historians, and sometimes offering his own remarks or excerpts from relevant documents. All of these, too, are run into the Adams cantos without differentiation whenever Pound happens to be copying from the bottom of a page and hence from a footnote. The *Works* is a model of organizational clarity, but handled in this way it becomes an untranslated Rosetta Stone, except that the Rosetta Stone had clearly marked divisions among its three sections.

William Vasse's revelation of Pound's page-turning use of Adams's *Works,* although obscurely phrased, has been read and understood by Poundians after him. Yet, all who show familiarity with Vasse's essay

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accept his interpretation of the results. "Adams' most important actions," he writes,

> ...are made recurrent. Adams' mission to Holland to secure allies and money for the colonies is presented first by a statement of the mission's results (p. 92); the results are again stated (p. 122) but now in the more expanded, less official form of John Adams' diary; the documents of the mission are then presented (pp. 146-152) to show how that result was attained; and finally Adams' own estimation of his mission is recorded...The same method of restatement is used to focus attention upon all Adams' most important activities....

Aside from being implausible, this analysis neglects the fact that Pound himself did not subscribe to the notion of restatement. At the front of the Adams cantos volume he offered a table of contents that, contrary to Vasse, claims a strictly chronological presentation of Adams's life. Though Pound of course wrote no such thing in the Adams cantos, the repetitions which occur in the *Works* made it possible for him to make such a table. Neither Pound nor his followers, then, offer a true picture of the contents of the Adams cantos.

That picture is amply provided in Frederick Sanders's *John Adams Speaking,* which brings together "the lines of the poem and Pound's sources in a way that permits a reader to see for himself what relationship exists between them." Marvelous to report, no irony is intended here. For Sanders, too, finds a structure of "thematic repetitions" in the Adams cantos, and reports that he is working on a book that will demonstrate this in an "elaborate study of each one of the 'Adams Cantos.'"

Sanders has nothing to say about Kenner's misreadings but does note some of Pound's. To Vasse's original list of fifty errors in the Adams cantos he adds ninety-nine of his own. (These, however, do not include the misreadings and misidentifications that led Kenner astray.) When Pound uses "Imperative" for Adams's "impracticable," Sanders points out, "Pound's reader would have every reason to form just the opposite impression [from the truth]." Nevertheless Sanders believes that Pound's errors raise no more than the "matter of judgment" concerning "whether a particular textual deviation is to be taken as an error or as an example of the way the poet has adapted his sources to his art." Understandably, Sanders does not speculate on those errors, clearly not typographical, which pointlessly reverse the meanings of passages, change dates, or wrongly identify writers and recipients of letters. The lack of pattern in these suggests intellectual breakdown; indeed, Pound's only consistency is in tending to miscopy when a passage concerns money.

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For Sanders the triumphant demonstration of Pound's art occurs in Canto 70 when a passage is quoted out of the chronological order of John Adams's *Works*. There are exactly two such instances in the Adams cantos, both in number 70. One might ask why, if these were intentional, Pound made only two such departures. His failure elsewhere to do what Sanders praises here implies an indictment of all but these half dozen lines of the Adams cantos. But Sanders does not reveal that there are only two cases in point. He discusses the second as representative of Pound's method throughout.

What Pound actually did in Canto 70 is evident from a revealing line at the end of Canto 69:

vignette *in margine*

—vignette in the margin. Evidently Pound ran across and used a marginal comment by the previous owner of his book. He either added lines of his own to the comment or translated it into Poundian ("ov the 64 members ov the House ov reppyzentativs"). The historically knowledgeable content of the marginal vignette passage, for which Sanders is unable to find a source, rules out the possibility of its being Pound's own. Evidently he simply continued copying from his margin through the beginning of Canto 70. The quotation there which appears to be the result of turning forward one volume is far more likely to have come from this same margin than from Pound's own industry.

There is a touching affinity among Pound, Adams, and the anonymous author of the lines in the margin. All three display a familiar type of lonely and isolated American crankiness and all three are eccentric annotators of obscure books. In his old age Adams filled volumes with marginalia. Pound, like him an isolato in old age, wrote pages of cantos that at the most generous estimate might be classed as a primitive kind of marginalia. Insofar as Pound had any grasp of Adams's character it unfortunately came from Charles Francis Adams's biography and interpretive notes, both of which figure copiously in the Adams cantos. In these Adams is presented as a figure of marmoreal probity: the unsmiling public man Charles Francis thought it his duty to make his grandfather appear. Yet on the evidence of the *Works*, if one ignores Charles Francis, a more interesting John Adams of wayward passion can be discerned. Thus, as far as one can make out, Pound never perceived the affinities between himself and Adams. Needless to say, neither did he present a new image of Adams unknown to historians. (Here I should note that I was alerted to the probable use of marginalia by Pound partly by *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* by Zoltan Haraszti, a brilliant compilation of Adams's marginalia,

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and partly by the Poundianly vituperative marginalia in my own edition of Charles Francis's *Works of John Adams.*)

The Adams cantos stand as a representative case of the excesses of modernism, whose dogmas have shielded them from critical scrutiny. While the doctrine of the separation of art from life has protected their crackbrained and vicious ideas, the concurrent mythology of the artist has made Pound's life and these ideas appear as guarantees of poetic excellence. The modern writer, insofar as he appears as the alienated holder of unpopular opinions, and insofar as his works are unpleasant, obscure, and insulting, has the critical advantage. That his life and art might display these characteristics without the accompaniment of poetic achievement is hardly to be imagined. Of course a definitive analysis of Pound's state of mind during the 1930s will have to await a thorough biographical study. But in the meantime the evidence points to intellectual and poetic decline below the level of respectability, along with signs of mental breakdown. If the mindlessness of the Adams cantos has not been generally recognized, their impenetrability has been evident to any non-Poundian who has troubled to read them. Yet, instead of taking their lack of sense as continuous with Pound's political rantings, intelligent critics have labored to deceive themselves about the poetry while excusing the politics.

In this process the very senselessness of Pound's cantos guaranteed their respectability. For above all, it is obscurity that secures respect for works perceived as modernist. Had the Adams cantos displayed the beginnings of rational content and poetic form, then they might have been dismissed by non-Poundian critics. Instead, their impenetrability served to insulate them from scrutiny.

Yet if obscurity is worshipped it is not really believed in. Among all of the elaborate explanations about the necessary difficulty of modern verse, how often does a critic confess that he is unable to understand something? Pound has benefited not only from being obscure but from critical confidence that all modernism ultimately makes sense. In the case of the Adams cantos, therefore, the dementia of Pound himself, and the devotions of the Poundians are not chiefly at issue. What is at issue is the self-deception of the rest of the literary community. In "The Emperor's New Clothes" the courtiers who fail to speak up have the excuse of fear. Uncoerced, the critics of Pound have honored the Poundians and mispraised the Adams cantos. The case presents no adjunct to the muses diadem.

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BOOKS

OUT OF THE FIFTIES

I WOULD HAVE SAVED THEM IF I COULD. By Leonard Michaels. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York. $7.95.

I Would Have Saved Them If I Could, Leonard Michaels's first work of fiction to appear since *Going Places,* which was nominated for the National Book Award in 1969, is a much denser, more mature, and more complex book. I say "work of fiction," because this new book is difficult to classify as a mere collection of short stories, as many reviewers are doing, or as pieces of a novel or fragmentary novel, such as Gogol gave up to let go into print, or a personal dialectic of the present world as seen through Michaels's eyes. There are thirteen separate sections altogether, some of them broken into smaller sections that are given separate titles within the encompassing title, as in "Eating Out," "Downers," or in the remarkable title piece, "I Would Have Saved Them If I Could," and together they form a sharply inscribed ideogram of some of our contemporary ambivalences.

The "I" or narrator of much of the book, Phillip Liebowitz, who is sometimes cast in the third person and appears in other guises, as he did in *Going Places,* but is a consistent character throughout, is a product of the peculiarities of the fifties, when he came of age. One of the most easily accessible and humorous sections of the book, "In The Fifties," is a compounded litany of the attitudes and mores and meaningful stances and happenstances of that decade; done in wry pared-down sentences and compressed paragraphs, it begins: "In the fifties I learned to drive a car. I was frequently in love. I had more friends than now." And modulates from the political/intellectual: "I attended the lectures of the excellent E.B. Burgum until Senator McCarthy ended his tenure. I imagined N.Y.U. would burn." To the solipsistic absurd, partly generated, or so one infers,

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by the new availability of hallucinogenic drugs:"I listened to long conversations about the phenomenological weirdness of familiar reality and the great spiritual questions this entailed—for example, 'Do you think Wallace Stevens is a head?' " To slapstick: "I had a fight with a powerful fat man who fell on my face and was immovable." To the narrator's attending a protest demonstration in San Francisco, his first: "I walked beside a little kid who had a bag of marbles to throw under the hoofs of the horse cops. His mother kept saying, 'Not yet, not yet.' We marched all day. That was the end of the fifties." Which is the end of that section.

Dependent upon this period in American history, or decadence, and the narrator's upbringing, which began in Brooklyn and was generally among his family of recently emigrated Russian and Polish Jews, is the supposition that it is a dog-eat-dog world, or you are what you eat, to use a more seventyish phrase, or will become what you assimilate and consume. In "Eating Out," this premise is developed in the most interrelated, logical, and frightening way—though much of the book is frightening; a kind of intellectual mind rape—and if relentlessness can be called a defect, I would say that Michaels's book, in nailing down its dialectic, suffers from its relentlessness, though sometimes I wish a few others would.

Babel is obviously Michaels's literary mentor, but it often seems that Hemingway is a favorite sounding board, the Americanized side of Michaels's fascination with violence, suicide, and death (which has "eat" at its center), and perhaps a bit of a patriarchal scourge, being antiintellectual, a tyrant in most matters, and a fellow practictioner of the short sentence with the kick-back of a pistol shot; but then Hemingway was writing within his circumscribed limits, partly self-imposed, and place and time, and we have yet to define our own, if not some aspects of time itself. Some of the brilliant passages in this book help to do just that.

In "Murderers," for instance, which calls to mind "The Killers," the narrator, Phillip, begins riding the subway after his uncle dies of a heart attack: "My family came from Poland, then never went anyplace until they had heart attacks," which is what Phillip, at least in a metaphorical sense, seems stricken with. He rides thousands of miles, mostly underground (this will later surface in a submarine image of Kafka in "Storytellers, Liars, and Bores"), on the New York City subway system, and one day some friends come up as he's scraping his heel on a curb (this troublesome foot — satyriasis? — reappears in "Annabella's Hat," through the person of Lord Byron, in "Hello Jack," "The Captain," and elsewhere in more subtle forms), and mention that the rabbi is headed for home, walking fast, which means to them that he's about to have intercourse with his wife.

The boys go up to a rooftop, and on up to the roof of a water tank, from

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which they have an excellent view of the Rabbi's apartment through an open window. They watch the rabbi and his wife dance naked to a rumba, and then see the two adults, prototypes of their upbringing — she bald and wigged in blond, he bearded and with his penis slapping in time — begin to have sex standing up. And here, partly, is the difference between Hemingway's twenties and Michaels's fifties. This voyeurism of the primal scene is in contrast to Nick Adams's many direct confrontations with different aspects of reality.

As the boys observe the rabbi and his wife engaged, one of them is masturbating in a "cocktail-mixer motion," one is watching that, all are aroused in different ways from their communal experience, and then one of them slips on the water tank roof; his "ring hooked on a nailhead and the ring and ring finger remained. The hand, the arm, the rest of him, were gone." And at that moment, in a "freak of ecstasy," the rabbi's wife sees the boys, and the rabbi, not yet aware of what's really happened, runs to the window and yells, "Murderers." The boys get sent to a camp in New Jersey, where, at night in the bunkhouse, Phillip listens to owls: "I'd never before heard that sound, the sound of darkness, blooming, opening inside you like a mouth." A city boy's vision of death in the natural world, which makes this reviewer wish that Michaels would mine more deeply the Orthodox heritage underlying his books and spoken of more openly in some of his casual published prose, a heritage as primitive and edifying as the Old Testament.

In "Getting Lucky," which must have an eye of overview on Beckett's *Godot,* Liebowitz enters again, about fifteen years older, again riding the subway. He's now the employee of a scrofulous publisher, who will later reappear in the book, and as he rides dreamily to work he suddenly feels a hand, "a soft, inquisitive spider pinching the tongue of his zipper, dragging it toward the iron floor that boomed in the bones of his feet." He tries to figure out from the faces around him who's doing this, but doesn't want to make a scene. Was this perhaps a new fad, since fads in New York spread so rapidly? In the seventies, he might be more aggressive and self-protective, perhaps like the woman who recently yelled at a subway exhibitionist, "That's the littlest one I've ever seen!" But now Liebowitz "didn't think 'filthy need.' He made a bland face. It felt good. Some might call this 'a beautiful experience.' "

He comes, but is unable to allow the experience to end there (for he's felt that this is the epitome of New York sophistication, and he's got for free something that many New Yorkers would pay for), and he's sure he recognizes his inamorata in a vacuous-looking, heavily made-up highschool girl. She gets off at the next stop, and he follows her to the door of a Ladies Room, takes her arm, and is about to say, " 'You know me, don't you?' " At

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which point the "girl" whispers, " 'Get the claw off me, motherfucker, or I'll kick your balls!' " (Isn't this off? Wouldn't anybody who uses "motherfucker" say "kick you in the nuts," or are transvestites this peculiar even in speech?) Liebowitz goes out to the street, gets into a cab and hears its meter ticking—another detail that will occur at the book's end—as though toward the shortening of his life, and then the driver says, " *'Where,* mister.' " Liebowitz answers, " 'Nowhere.' "

Which echoes the reiterated refrain of Didi and Gogo and would be the end of a Hemingway piece, but Michaels, like Liebowitz, fortunately, perhaps, for our enlightenment, goes a bit further. The driver says to Liebowitz that this is costing him money; he can sit in the park for free. To which Liebowitz, recognizing in the "smug, annoyed superiority of the driver's tone" Manhattan's theme, replies, " 'I want to pay. Shut up.' " And, echoing the tone he's heard, brings the other side of himself full circle again.

This is indicative of the ambivalences that dreamers and moralists are strung upon, and part of the complex point that Michaels is trying to make in his nearly faultlessly organized second book. How does Trotsky, in "Trotsky's Garden" (apparently a parody of Barthelme's "Tolstoy's Museum," while at the same time functioning as a self-contained mantrap), for example, justify the number of deaths that have followed in his wake, largely due to his unshakable faith in his and Marx's and Engel's dialectical materialism? What has Trotsky learned of the soul of materialistic or merely common man? Trotsky, in Michaels's version, is in Mexico, in exile, staring out at his sunlit garden, which will be incorporated into his prose, as he writes of dialectical materialism. Meanwhile, "Dialectical materialism," Michaels writes, "in the heart of the day, draws a pickax from its raincoat." Trotsky is hit from behind in the head by the man in the raincoat, but manages, being who he is, to bite his assassin's hand and fling himself over his desk, to write, " 'On hot days in Mexico beware of raincoats.' "

Michaels has been compared by some reviewers to Barthelme, but has Barthelme, using the detritus of history or any of the absurd manifestations of contemporaneity he handles so well, ever made such a bloodily succinct point, except, possibly, in the "A Manual For Sons" section of his most recent *The Dead Father?* Michaels's and Barthelme's periodical publications, most of which are later gathered into their books, have appeared nearly concurrently over the years, and Michaels is, at this writing, for his illimitable exuberance, forty-three; Barthelme is forty-five. In many ways, in terms of influence, it seems surely possible that Michaels has touched on Barthelme as much as Barthelme on Michaels, especially since Barthelme

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didn't really delve deeply into anguish, Michaels's prime subject, until *The Dead Father*. Before Michaels was linked to such writers with the appearance of this book, he obviously had to conceive of and even compose many of its chapters, since they've been appearing in print since 1970.

He's also being lumped, in several ways, with Philip Roth, who certainly saw "City Boy," the only piece of Michaels's writing I can conceivably compare to Roth (how can it be compared to *Goodbye, Columbus, Letting Go,* or *When She Was Good,* for example?) before he completed *Portnoy's Complaint,* being the avid reader he witnesses himself as in *Reading Myself And Others* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975). "Whacking Off," the first portion of *Portnoy's Complaint,* appeared in Issue #3, Summer, 1967, of this review; "City Boy" in the Feb. 15, 1967 issue of *Paris Review.* Roth is also forty-five. *Portnoy's Complaint* was put between covers as a novel in 1969, the same year that *Going Places,* pieces of which appeared from 1964 to 1969, was published, and, in 1964, Roth, serving as judge for the *Massachusetts Review,* selected "Sticks and Stones" for that publication's annual Quill Award. To ferret out who was whose influence or Godfather would be to belabor a point.

In his use of Trotsky, Byron, Dostoyevsky, Freud, Hegel, Kafka, Marx, Wordsworth, and other literary and cultural and philosophical figures from the past, usually not as mere entities from the past, but often as integrated characters and full-bodied spokesmen in his book, Michaels seems to be saying that our lives and histories pursue us, or that we are "chasing constructions," as Kafka wrote in one of his letters; and that men who attain prominence, whether during their lifetimes or through the hindsight of beatifying history, have been caught up in "the word." This is the same word that proceeded down to us out of the darkness and became light, and Michaels illuminates just how much, other than in the Scriptures, this history tends to gloss over, or simply lie.

Whether the above mentioned figures were savage, Christlike, malingering, conciliatory, emotional, cold, or whatever, they have always drawn to themselves forces equally opposed or apposite, or so Michaels seems to be saying, and these forces, seen from different perspectives, can make the man inside the figure seem entirely other than what he was, or is. Or, on the other hand, can help define his character with a more obvious congruity. The confined parameters of intellectuality have never been able to bring alive and deck out in flesh such a prescient point. Nor, perhaps, have Michaels's intellectual mentors been given such a healthy rap on their knuckles, which might be why so many of them have had their ire inflamed to near incoherence by this book, both in private conversation and in print — e.g., Irving Howe in his negative review in

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the November 13, 1975 issue of *The New York Review of Books.*

I Would Have Saved Them If I Could is a carefully constructed statement about our times, in our time, movingly developed, and each of its sections, interlocking and precise, progress to prepare us for the final one, "The Captain," which could be the culmination of an elaborate novel. The levels of language, bargaining, usury, cannibalism, pseudo-moralism, moralism, fractured consciousness, and pertinent surrealism that permeate this piece, set at a publisher's party, as each character in the cast of minorities runs or shuffles or limps or fornicates around to find the ultimate big bang to blow away his or her grievance that the others present, opposed to him, mistrust (as well they might), is too complex to have the space here to begin to define. Michaels's book must be read as a whole.

As a whole, it is a luminous presentation of the density of an organized and assimilating mind, and though the relentlessness I've mentioned might be difficult for some to cope with, Michaels's short, strong, poetic sentences stand forth with a moral courage not to be found in the treacly, etiolated, and commercial prose of many of his contemporaries, not including, of course, Barthelme or Roth. His world, which fortunately isn't devoid of a resilient humor that can elicit bellylaughs and compassion, is both brutal and generously kind to the brutalized. He is the boy in "Murderers" who has fallen from the water tank, the Icarus of myths, the observer who's experienced secondhand the horror of the fall, and he is also the enraged rabbi and the enraged rabbi's wife being spied upon — all those whose relationships have been changed because of the complexity of the response, not to say the fall, which has been recorded by the moralist who perceives with emotion, the man with spectacles on his nose and autumn in his heart.

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BEYOND FORMALISM

A MAP OF MISREADING. By Harold Bloom. Oxford University Press. $8.95.
KABBALAH and CRITICISM. By Harold Bloom. The Seabury Press. $6.95.
THE FATE OF READING. By Geoffrey Hartman. University of Chicago Press. $15.00.

Formalism—called "New Criticism" when it was still young, aggressive, and ambitious—seems to have died from its own success. Any ordinary modern critic can read with unprecedented sensitivity to nuances of meaning and to the delicate formal economy of part and whole. More important, the critic's language can report the subtlest reading in terms of precise textual details. This habit of rigorous reading is evidently indispensable for modern poetry. But earlier texts—from Shakespeare and the metaphysicals to the romantics—also profited from formalist analyses. These replaced an older style of literary study, personified in the "gentleman scholar" who combined sensitivity with broad learning and good taste with sound memory. Early formalists trusted that the *Oxford English Dictionary* contained enough history to let an explicator get on with his real task: reading. And instead of basing critical judgments on personal taste or on unquestioned community standards, explication itself, shrewdly conducted, was expected to lead from neutral description toward the exhibition of complexity and internal coherence, these two constituting a double and virtually self-evident criterion for excellence. But despite the multiplication of subtle readers, the problems of literary history and evaluation have proved intractable. And these problems are the core of Harold Bloom's and Geoffrey Hartman's efforts to get beyond formalism.

A few years ago, Professor Bloom found what seemed to him the solution to the twin problems. In a staggering burst of energy, he expounded that solution in three books—*The Anxiety of Influence* and the two here (the dustjacket of *Kabbalah and Criticism* promises a new book next year). Bloom apparently began with a meditation on Blake's largely deliberate struggle for originality, and especially for autonomy from his chief poetic source, Milton. Taking that struggle against a powerful predecessor as the core of romantic poetry, Bloom dissected it into six sequential stages, called "revisionary ratios." Bloom's critical diction is eclectic, even eccentric, but not finally esoteric; the term here is chosen to trigger very specific—in this case, Blakean—implications. The form of a later poem then lies in its relation to an earlier poem; a relation that is complex and subterranean but structurally unvarying. The later poem will be great

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("strong," Bloom says) in proportion as it successfully works through its struggle against its predecessor; that is, passes through all six stages. Through struggle, new "strong" poems emerge out of old "strong" poems; this process is "canon-formation," the evaluative side of literary history that decides which poems will live and which perish. This scheme of ratios, then, solves both of formalism's problems. The poem is no longer isolated, but rather connected with something else of the same kind. Reading is "historical" but still "literary," and doesn't reduce the poem to its "cause" in biography or in social, political, or intellectual history. And the scheme establishes an evaluative standard proposed, as it were, by the poets themselves.

Bloom treats the invariability of the six-stage scheme as an empirical fact rather than a theoretical postulate. He later reinterprets the scheme in psychoanalytic terms, as a sequence of defense mechanisms countering the "anxiety of influence." But this psychologistic turn may have been something of a misstep, since it tends to subordinate whole poems to stages in the poet's emerging and developing sense of his own vocation. *A Map of Misreading* again reinterprets the scheme, this time in terms of rhetorical tropes and images within the poem. Bloom thereby makes clear that the relation is not so much between later and earlier poets as between later and earlier poems: "the use of any psychopoetics is to find a way back to an enrichment of rhetorical criticism." The relation is not one of "source" in the usual sense that could be brought out by parallel quotation. It is a deeply structuring principle in creation which Bloom calls "the Primal Scene of Instruction." Bloom's argument is difficult; but its main point is to defend humanism—even a somewhat pessimistic humanism—against contemporary philosophical theories of "textuality," which deny that any "author" stands at the origin of the text. Bloom accepts the importance of intertextual relations, but insists that "the human writes, the human thinks, and always following after and defending against another human."

Around the middle of *A Map of Misreading,* Bloom finally brings out the completed map in tabular form. It charts, he says, *"how meaning is produced* in Post-Enlightenment strong poetry by the substitutive interplay of figures and of images, by the language strong poets use in defense against, and response to, the language of prior strong poets." It is worth stressing the qualification of intent here, perhaps even narrowing it more than Bloom himself does or seems to do. The discussion is in fact strongly focused on lyric, first; on English lyric, second; and on post-Miltonic English lyric, third. The range of Bloom's reading as he ransacks Freud, Vico, Nietzsche, and many others on his way to the map produces potentially misleading expansive gestures. An ambition to schematize the "typi-

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cal" post-Miltonic English lyric is large, but specific and empirical; it is to be contrasted with those apocalyptic generalities that seek *the* "origin" of "literature," but find only gloomy and convulsive flashes to illuminate that night in which all cats are gray.

Bloom proceeds to test the map on Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," and then on poems by Milton, Emerson, Whitman, with more fragmentary readings of others. Bloom recognizes that his scheme is precisely schematic, that poets have rebelled against the model, that subtypes and variant possibilities exist. He does not specify these, unfortunately, but insists that the basic scheme is there as an aid to reading. The problem is that a map, while not inaccurate, may still be hard to use; for maps are necessarily incomplete. Bloom is not very good at binding the scheme to the concrete instance. His commentaries are almost as difficult to interpret as the map itself or as those powerfully abstract meditations that lead up to it. Bloom may wish to guard against further reduction of a flexible scheme into a mechanical operation of the spirit. The hopefulness he implies by discovering *the* structure of romantic lyric is tempered by the pessimism of calling that structure a misreading.

Kabbalah and Criticism repeats the theory in a new key. Bloom relies mainly on Gershom Scholem, and is probably the first theorist to use kabbalah since Scholem's friend Walter Benjamin. At some points the exposition here is more intelligible, though still veiled in a cloud of witnesses from Hans Jonas and C.S. Peirce to Freud, Emerson, and beyond. Bloom seems to shift or at least readjust his scheme in each fresh presentation. One might wish he had bided his time, reduced his discoveries to a single system, however multi-layered, and then expounded it with magisterial lucidity. But such counsel is by now pointless.

Bloom has usefully insisted anew and in instructive detail that literary language or form is not simply handed down as though it were accumulated cultural capital. But it seems to me the poet does not only struggle against his medium; he also struggles *with* it. He struggles to express new experiences under changed historical conditions, and he may feel not just hostility that Milton got there first, but perhaps a sorrow or even an anxiety that Milton offers him no precedent. Adapting a poetic medium doubtless involves "creative forgetting" or possibly "creative misunderstanding" of tradition; but these may be less hostility than a way of preserving what in an older poet and his creation is still living. Besides, literary history does not form one canon, but several. The ancestral voices are many and varied. It is surely noteworthy that a "new" poetic movement frequently goes hand in hand with the resuscitation of some old poet. Could not tradition in its variety be enabling as well as inhibiting?

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This question comes close to the view of literary history that Geoffrey Hartman takes. He wonders if there might be possible a preservation of tradition that is defensive neither toward the "masses" nor toward tradition itself. Hartman's ambition, I think, is to recover the possibility of writing literary history after the devastating gain of consciousness and self-consciousness brought about by formalism. The days are gone when a poem reduced itself to a few brisk commonplaces that could be catalogued in a score of texts, ancient and modern. After formalism, any decent poem seems an abyss of complication. Equally, literary history can no longer content itself with external narrative patterns unthinkingly borrowed from Darwin or Hegel. Hartman's solution to the difficulty is to transfer historical consciousness from the literary historian to the poets themselves.

Hartman may have the most acute consciousness of form in modern criticism. But the form he studies is itself a rise or intensification of the poet's consciousness as it confronts literary tradition, including the state or spirit of the language. Form is a delicate balance between individuated self-consciousness and a medium preserved by the saving acknowledgement of its objectivity. The readings of Keats in this volume trace with moving subtlety his search for something "to set a bottom for inwardness, to limit an endless and corrosive self-concern." The ode "To Autumn" is Keats's triumphant discovery of the answer. Hartman's uncanny talent is to make literary history rise out of the poet's own effort to focus the revel of inherited forms and conventional topics. Literary history does not go on behind the poet's back, but precisely through the thoughtful labor of his creation. Form is not fixed beyond history; nor is it the organic economy of the unique poem. Form *is* history—or at least it is so in literary history. The tension between literary historian and critic dissolves; for the critic reading the poem's form has to see that form as the shadow cast by the poet's own historical consciousness.

Despite the differences, Hartman in a sense complements Bloom. While Bloom strides across the bridge of tradition from strong poem to strong poem, Hartman is willing to work more patiently through the smaller fry, the Grays and Collinses. His reward is a more varied and less anxious sense of the poem's relation to tradition. Our reward as readers is to find in *Beyond Formalism* and *The Fate of Reading* a few anticipatory sketches for that history of the "spirit of romance" from Milton through the English romantics that Geoffrey Hartman—and, I believe, only he of all living scholars—has it in him to write. That history could triumphantly disclose in poetry and testify by its own existence to the power of a rememorative word. Such a word would augment us all.

DONALD MARSHALL

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KRAZY KAT AND BRICK BAT

PUSS IN BOOTS. by Ludwig Tieck. University of Texas Press. $3.45

"Next to dodging bricks, I like reading Tieck most."
— Krazy Kat

The old, finely developed art of disrupting plays with a cat-call or a volley of oranges is rarely practiced any more by theater audiences. Unseemly snoring can be heard occasionally in the balcony, but nothing survives comparable to the behavior of theater audiences in classical Athens, Restoration London, or Hugo's Paris, where, through their orange-throwing, hissing, footstamping, and applause for serious ideas as well as jests, spectators criticized live performances while watching them. Playwrights needed no printed criticism to know whether their plays were popular. Audiences came to be heard as well as to hear; to be seen, as well as to see. Electric lighting and fourth wall realism had not yet relegated spectators to the darkness and silence of voyeurism. That came later, after Antoine advised nineteenth-century French actors to imagine a wall between themselves and the audience—to act as if no one was watching—and after electric lights could be turned off in the house to further encourage the illusion that no audience was present.

Not all post-Antoine theater encouraged voyeurism, of course. Modern playwrights such as Brecht, Wilder, and Peter Handke have acknowledged the presence of their audience by having actors directly address the house. Handke turns the audience into the central character of *Offending The Audience;* his actors tell the audience "You are the subject...you are the event," and then call the spectators all sorts of names which acknowledge the audience's collective presence while ridiculing it. To insure vocal audience response as well as audience presence for his play, *Each in His Own Way,* Pirandello wrote two intervals during which actors impersonate spectators and comment on the production.

These audience provocations by Handke and Pirandello are not merely counteractions to modern audience quietude, but also continuations of a theatrical tradition that has its beginnings in the audience-directed insults of Aristophanic satire, and recurs throughout theater history in the form of prologues, induction scenes, and plays-within-plays that comment on audience presence and prejudices. One of the most humorous plays in this

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tradition is Ludwig Tieck's *Puss In Boots,* first published in 1797, and unavailable in an English translation between 1914 and 1974. In 1974, as part of its Edinburgh Bilingual series, the University of Texas Press released a translation of Tieck's comedy, and there remains no excuse to keep this play off American stages. Particularly now, when audiences display the same passivity at live theater performances that they exhibit in front of celluloid projections and cathode ray tubes, it seems appropriate to revive *Puss In Boots.* With lines already written by Tieck for spectators, and with stage directions for fruit-throwing and footstamping, the play offers ordinarily speechless audience members hints about what they can say or do during a performance, or at least what might have been said and done by audiences during Tieck's lifetime, before fourth wall realism and silence prevailed in theaters.

The spectators for whom Tieck wrote lines in *Puss In Boots* were not the smartest ones around; why else would they need lines written in advance? They lacked spontaneity and imagination, which was part of Tieck's argument against the prevailing aesthetic prejudices of his day and ours—prejudices which favor imitation of "nature," now called realism — and keep the improbabilities of fantasy, surrealism, and abstract art out of theater. Renouncing the age-old Aristotelian premise that drama should imitate probable and in that sense natural actions, Tieck's comedy introduces its protesting audience to such improbable characters as a talking, man-sized cat named Hinze, a King of Utopia who exchanges his daughter for rabbits, a clown who speaks as the voice of the scenery, and an apologetic playwright (surely few of them exist in actuality) who keeps coming on stage to placate footstamping spectators.

The footstamping shills for whom Tieck wrote lines keep disrupting a whimsical, parodic fairy tale derived from the writings of Charles Perrault. While initially improbable, the tale, in which Hinze the Cat secures for his young human master Gottlieb an invitation to marry the Princess of Utopia, becomes more surreal and farcically anarchistic as it is interrupted by protests. The spectacle of planted spectators, a man claiming to be the author, and a huge cat discussing the play's merits with one another combines the hallucinogenic fantasies of R. Crumb's *Fritz the Cat* comics with the best theatrical high jinks of Pirandello. In fact, it is quite possible that while studying in Germany, Pirandello read Tieck's play and later imitated it in *Six Characters* and *Each In His Own Way.*

Tieck not only anticipated Pirandello's illusion-breaking techniques of self-conscious dialogue, but he also ridiculed audience aesthetic preferences that are still flourishing in twentieth-century America. The sentimental melodrama of Albee's *Seascape,* Pinero's *Short Eyes,* Leslie Lee's *First*

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Breeze of Summer, and other recent prize-winning American plays may not be quite the same as the sentimental melodrama demanded by Tieck's audience, but the resemblances are close enough that no American director will have to update Tieck's satiric comments on audience taste. The shills who protest Tieck's fairy tale dramatization do so out of a preference for tame, sentimental, Kotzebue-style melodrama; for well-made, instantly comprehensible stories, the old "family stories—abductions—country cousins—things like that," as one of them puts it. While audiences rarely disrupt plays these days, if they did, they would probably uphold the popular prejudices that Tieck recorded in *Puss In Boots.* Reasonable facsimilies of these prejudices, complaints such as:

> We've paid, we constitute the public, so we demand our own standard of good taste, and no foolery!
>
> *
>
> Only nature should ever be presented on the stage.
>
> *
>
> I can't preceive any rational illusion in that.
>
> *
>
> And no love interest either!
>
> *
>
> What improbabilities!

can still be found in *New York Times* play reviews, let alone in theater lobbies during intermission.

As Gerald Gillespie, editor and translator of this welcome *Puss In Boots* edition, notes in his introduction to the play, Tieck's drama "constituted an attack mainly against the theater public itself." That similar attacks against the German theater public were written by Grabbe in *Satire, Irony, Jest, and Deeper Significance* (1822) and by Büchner in *Danton's Death* (1835), suggests at least one common denominator among these three important playwrights, all of whose plays were unproduced or underproduced during their lifetimes, and all of whom relatively neglected in America.

In a satirical attack upon prevalent if unwritten rules of drama circa 1820, Grabbe's Baron Mushcliff declared that in writing a play for the audiences of his day

> The plot, in particular, you must so fashion as to be charmingly flat and trivial—otherwise not every near-sighted sheepshead would be able to take it in. You must not expect the smallest understanding or spirit of inquiry from the reader.

This complaint in *Jest, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Significance* is not too

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different from the one voiced by Camille Desmoulins in *Danton's Death:*

> ...unless they have wooden copies of everything, scattered about in theaters, concert halls, and art exhibits, people have neither eyes nor ears for it....Take a minor sentiment, a maxim, a notion, and dress it up in coat and trousers, make pairs of hands and feet for it, color its face and permit the whole thing to moan and agonize about for three whole acts until at last it has either married or shot itself dead—and they will cry out that it was ideal.

Schiller's Romantic idealizations of nature and Kotzebue's popular, sentimental plays upset Tieck, Grabbe, and Buchner to the extent that the latter three became theater critics as well as playwrights. While this threesome's plays are far more than vehicles for criticism of theater audiences, in part they ridicule an audience sensibility that craves idealized, beautiful and noble nature displayed in readily comprehensible and self-congratulatory drama.

Self-congratulation in theater is not an exclusively nineteenth-century phenomenon; in fact, some vanity may be inherent in any age's language—in the illusory control over morality and nature that men find in art. Once given names, things become classifiable, orderly, predictable, or so the illusion goes. Tieck destroys this illusion in *Puss In Boots* by breaking the situational frame of his fairy tale, by having characters in the play (including one portraying the author) lose control over events, as if the words of Tieck's text have been forgotten or disregarded. "So many things come unexpectedly in this world," says Gottlieb of Tieck's Utopia. One of the most unpredictable, uncontrollable things in *Puss In Boots* is the audience response, though paradoxically, the riot is completely controlled by Tieck insofar as it is scripted in advance.

Hinze the talking cat further derides humanity's assumption that language or art controls events, when he explains why most cats prefer silence to human speech:

> ...as soon as language were inflicted on us so-called animals, there would be no more joy in the world. Think of all the things a dog has to do and learn! And the horse! They are foolish animals to permit men to notice their intelligence; they just have to indulge their vanity. We cats are still the freest race ever, because despite all our cleverness we know how to pose as creatures so inept that man quite gives up trying to educate us.

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Hinze knows, as if he has read Peter Handke's play, *Kaspar,* or as if Handke has read *Puss In Boots,* that human speech tends to exercise tyranny over living creatures when they submit to its laws; it requires dogs to jump through hoops, and worse. But Hinze is too clever to indulge the vanity of hoop-wielding men, or to accept their language's tyranny. When Law, personified by a mouse in Tieck's play, obstructs Hinze's journey, Hinze devours the Law. As long as there are cats like him, and cat-calling, rebellious audiences like the one in Tieck's play, the tyrannies that language and art exercise over us will remain incomplete.

JOEL SCHECHTER

MARX UPENDED

Twilight of Authority. By Robert Nisbet. Oxford University Press. $10.95.

The author of this likeable but slightly crotchety book is a distinguished historian of social thought. It is a book clearly inspired by an acutely, sincerely felt sense of malaise concerning our shared social and political condition. But it is very much argued at the level of social ideas rather than of realities; or at least, that is where the stress seems to be. The ills are described concretely enough, but one somehow has the impression that in the author's estimation both their roots and their remedy lie in the sphere of thought. As if to confirm one in this impression, the author defiantly tells us:

> Everything vital in history reduces itself ultimately to ideas, which are the motive forces. Man *is* what he thinks. Thus might the epigram be restated...I know nothing more absurd than the 'realist' position that ideas and ideals do not shape history.

There follows a slightly suspect demonstration that this must be so. Granted that, as Nisbet states, human history differs from biological history, which is a statistical account of the development of populations. Agreed that human history has as its units whole institutional complexes. These however, Nisbet continues, embody or express or are based on ideas. This step seems to me far more questionable, though of course it can be made trivially true by equating an institution with the idea or ideas it

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illustrates, irrespective of whether those ideas are held or articulated by the people whom the institutions in question comprise. But no matter; the failure of this proof, if such it is, does not necessarily invalidate the book.

If it be ideas which make or unmake us, let us look at the good ideas which could save us, and at the manifestations of the bad ones which are destroying us, in that order—which is to read the book back to front, a practice which is perhaps more rational in Panaceas for the Times than in crime novels. Generically, it seems that our salvation lies in pluralism. Nisbet invokes the authority of William James for the contention that we live in a pluralistic universe, and adds that normally we also live in a pluralistic society (though at the moment it is alas in decline and in peril). He does not distinguish between a pluralism which repudiates attempts at intellectual unification or even coherence, and a pluralism which encourages a multiplicity of associations or power centers in society, with a view to avoiding tyranny. My own impression is that we have far too much of the former kind of pluralism, though we can probably hardly ever have too much of the latter. Nisbet's own pluralism breaks up into four distinctive constituents:

1. Functional autonomy. This is:

> the ability of each major function in the social order to work with the maximum possible freedom to achieve its own distinctive ends. What applies to school or university should apply also to economy, to family, to religion, and to each of the other great spheres of society.

This sounds like a variant of laissez-faire, applied not to economic enterprises, but to entire spheres of social life. Though there is an admission that "perfect autonomy is scarcely possible, or even desirable perhaps," as a general ideal this seems odd. Functional specificity is a very modern trait, and even in modern society, it is only very imperfectly achieved. Are we to damn all those traditional societies whose institutions are so often multipurpose ones? It is odd to find a conservative-minded sociologist, or perhaps a sociologically-minded conservative, such as Nisbet, saying something which seems to imply such a recommendation.

2. Decentralization. An ideal not very much in dispute, perhaps. Though one wonders whether Nisbet is determined enough in pursuit of the social factors which underlie centralist trends, and whether he is not too willing to blame it on "a passion in the political clerisy during most of this century" adding that this clerisy "is increasingly becoming but another word for the Federal government today." There is in his thought a deep distrust of government in Washington, which may rather flatter the

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politicians and bureaucrats of that city, by treating them as prime daemons behind the current deterioration of the world. In Nisbet, this rather populist sentiment is clothed in elegant language, enriched by apt allusions to the grand tradition of European thought since the Greeks. All the same, this slightly narrow definition of the prime target gives an impression of parochialism to a non-American reader.

3. Hierarchy. This is a more contentious and hence spicy ideal. No one would openly espouse centralization, as once they would not espouse sin; but hierarchy, inequality, is quite another matter. It was Raymond Aron, who is rightly one of the European sages whom Nisbet invokes, who observed that one of the deep troubles of industrial society may be its aspiration for an equality which is not compatible with its real organizational requirements. But Nisbet's critique is, alas, not very specific socially. Inequality is justified by a general principle applicable (if at all) anywhere: "Hierarchy in some degree is...an ineradicable element of the social bond..." In a book concerned with our present discontents, we should have liked to hear a great deal more about the specific forms of our contemporary social bond, rather than about the bond *an sich*.

His dislike of contemporary egalitarianism—and perhaps his overrating of ideas as sources of social trends—leads the author to take a good swipe at John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*. But the weakness of the approach exemplified by that book seems to me to be rather in its a-sociologism, its willingness to return, *nur mit ein bischen anderen Worten,* to the State of Nature, to what we would do if we were starting society afresh. But we are what our history has made us. The fact that we are born into a complex and constraining social heritage, with all this implies, is not simply an unfortunate complication which one can usefully think away when doing social philosophy. On the contrary, it is the very essence of our predicament. The *Gedankenexperiment* resulting from imagining the contrary is a sterile one: as Raymond Aron has noted, it feeds us back our values, good or bad, with the quite illusory benefit that they are now derived from some purer, less contentious premises....But Nisbet, disappointingly, seems willing to argue with this position on its own terms, rather than challenging it more fundamentally.

4. Tradition. In his high valuation of this manner of conducting human affairs, there is more than a merely verbal affinity between Nisbet's views and those of Michael Oakeshott.

> I mean reliance upon, in largest possible measure, not formal law, ordinance, or administrative regulation, but use and wont, the uncalculated but effective mechanisms of the social order, custom, folkway,

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> and all the uncountable means of adaptation by which human beings have proved so often to be masters of their destinies in ways governments cannot even comprehend.

Given this manifest disapproval of the use of "formal law, ordinance, and administrative regulation," one would expect from a distinguished historian of sociological theory a discussion of the merits or otherwise of Max Weber's theories concerning why the modern world appears to be going in this direction. But no; instead we get an account of the rival intellectual traditions which favor or condemn this trend.

His traditionalism is nevertheless superior to Oakeshott's even if it fails to explore in depth the forces which oppose it; at least it recognizes that it is one way of doing things, among others—instead of wavering between the doctrine that it is the right way because there can be no other, and the view that tradition is a very clever automatic pilot who is better than the human ones. Furthermore, Nisbet knows his enemies, while Oakeshott seems all too willing to include in his pantheon all philosophers as long as they have been dead for a sufficiently long time—then squaring their views with his own by insisting (against all plausibility) that thinkers such as Plato or Kant simply did not intend what they said to be seriously implemented. Nisbet, for instance, disapproves of Plato for the usual reasons. Some of his other dislikes, however, are more original and interesting. For instance, he clearly thinks that our conventional wisdom overrates the Renaissance:

> Despite the widespread conviction that the Italian Renaissance was an illustrious age of philosophy, it was in fact as sterile in this regard as it was in science.

Or again, he dislikes Roman Law. He does not see the primary significance of its diffusion in the West in "its manifold uses in commerce and trade," which he says he does not question, but in another sphere:

> Roman Law as we know it in the Institutes of Justinian is predominantly the law of a strong military state.

How, in the end, are we to assess this contribution to the understanding of our social predicament? One's main worry concerns its intellectualist and Manichean approach: two traditions of thought confront each other, one good and one bad. This really important division cuts across conventional party lines: pluralist-conservatives and anarchists are both together, and jointly on the side of the angels.

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It would be unfair to say that the social context of this struggle is ignored. On the contrary, we are given many suggestive historical aperçus. But they do not quite meld into some kind of overall picture or diagnosis. Indeed, there is a hint of a conspiracy theory instead: the misguided tradition is upheld by a class of centralizers whom he likes to call the political clerisy. It starts with Plato, includes Hobbes and Bentham, and most of the recent U.S. presidents and their entourages. And yet, at this moment of our great darkness, there is hope. The very gravity of our situation will teach us the lesson we need:

> ...as the Reformation taught the West the expendability of one kind of clerisy, so, it seems evident, will this twilight of authority we are living in teach us the expendability of the political clerisy; in simple, blunt truth, the political intellectual is as obsolete as his religious prototype had become by the sixteenth century.

ERNEST GELLNER

POET OF BRITISHNESS

High Windows. By Philip Larkin. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $6.95.

Once a decade a slim volume of Larkin's poems appear. In England it is an event. For Philip Larkin is the finest contemporary British poet and, among the major poets writing in English, he is the one to whom I turn most enthusiastically. The latest collection, *High Windows,* offers two major poems, the title poem itself and "The Old Fools," a scathing anthem to age; there is also a varied array of English character, Larkin's renderings of a changed British landscape and the "miniature gaiety" of a fatigued culture, his probings into the complex question of inheritance, and the quietly difficult heroism of behaving humanly. In this volume Larkin is again the poet of inheritance and succession, who speaks of prize vegetables and baked goods at a country fair as "pure excellences that enclose/A recession of skills." I and others have been ten years' randy for

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Larkin's clear, hard, bitingly restrained voice—the voice of the emotional accountant, who knows the price and value and final tally of life's losses:

> "Man hands on misery to man.
> It deepens like a coastal shelf."

The added dividend in *High Windows* is the expanded use of Larkin's colloquial voice; a voice which, in its careful manipulations of British idiom, gives the poems an even greater range and conversational directness and simplicity born of that slangy bravado.

The poems open quickly: "They fuck you up, your mum and dad"; "Groping back to bed after a piss..."; "When I see a couple of kids/And guess he's fucking her and she's..." The characteristic tension in *High Windows* is between this surprising, involving diction and what follows; it is a tension full of drama, internal comment and self-irony. Larkin reinforces our feeling that both high and low voices exist simultaneously, side by side, in each of us—which makes this volume uniquely accessible. Readers who like poetry are intrigued, caught off guard; readers who do not like poetry cannot help being engaged. Of course other poets have used the colloquial voice to similar purpose. But few have Larkin's dedication to and skill with rhyme and verse form, and both of these prematurely interred devices serve to impose control and pace on the language's apparent slackness. The reader travels great distances in the best poems in *High Windows,* from those irreverent, casual, conversational openings up the scale of emotion to the "fresh-peeled voice" of Larkin's thrush, capable as ever, of "astonishing the brickwork."

The colloquial poems avoid condescension, the most serious problem of dialect writing, by unwavering fidelity to the vocabulary of the characters' imagination and by vicious adherence to some of their worst impulses. In the great poems, Larkin uses a similar, relaxed, thoroughly British narrator who seems closest to Larkin himself—how close I do not know or care. The obvious suggestion is that this narrator suffers similar frustrations and limitations, only he is more articulate at expressing them.

I quote the entire title poem:

> "When I see a couple of kids
> And guess he's fucking her and she's
> Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
> I know this is paradise
>
> Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives—

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Bonds and gestures pushed to one side
Like an outdated combine harvester,
And everyone young going down the long slide

To happiness, endlessly. I wonder if
Anyone looked at me, forty years back,
And thought, *That'll be the life;*
No God any more, or sweating in the dark

About hell and that, or having to hide
What you think of the priest. He
And his lot will all go down the long slide
Like free bloody birds. And immediately

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows;
The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless."

"High Windows" is a startlingly compressed history of time and expectation, in which Larkin transmutes sex, and the beliefs about others' happiness into a durable, universal irony. The casual but calculated vulgarity of the first free-verse quatrain, or from another point of view, the verbal freedom, is clearly tied to the widespread dissemination of birth control devices. The once imposing fears of the pre-War generation, its "sweating in the dark/About hell and that," are dressed up in more formal rhymed quatrain. Style depicts history; arguments and expectations jostle, are poised and counterpoised until, at the end of the poem, they are superseded by a perspective that is viewable but unattainable in this life. In our day, two simple nouns are used to describe centuries of tradition, the most complex social mechanisms—"Bonds and gestures pushed to one side." ("to one side" comes at the end of the line.) Likewise, that "outdated combine harvester" was once a great laborsaving device, a revolutionary invention which, in 1875, replaced two separate machines, providing the 2-in-1 answer to the farming world's needs. Today's brash linguistic strut has not created paradise, just as the 19th century's belief in progress has not; as yet there has not been, as far as I know, "A brilliant breaking of the bank,/A quite unlosable game." Man's relation to happiness is not altered by god's death or improved means of contraception, even if these "advances," naturally, have their pleasures.

The same grass-is-greener mentality existed then and will always exist. Larkin has not noted any appreciable change in the pigment of the

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illusion. So the narrator is not alone as he stands, at the close of "High Windows," where men will always stand, on the earthbound side of freedom, looking up at the vast indifferent and oblivious blue. Looking up is, of course, very different from the innocent country pleasure of "going down the long slide/To happiness, endlessly." ("endlessly," the adverb is used figuratively; "endless," the noun which ends the poem, is literal; birds fly in that blue; they don't slide.)

"High Windows" is a poem about space as well as time. The last four lines create that space, suddenly slide it in under the reader, fixing the narrator's position to those high windows. Time uses words while space is mute.

Presiding over the generational envies is Larkin's exquisite multiplex image—"The sun-comprehending glass." It is the comprehending, the transferring medium, the single plane which dwells exclusively in the present (as our eyes might be said to dwell eternally in the present but character and linguistic style cannot). The glass "comprehends" as it is lit and warmed by the sun and air; as it touches and is touched by it; as it reflects it; as it lets the sun-surrounding blue air pass through. The glass literally does "take in" that which passes through it, yet, in an extraordinary act of generosity, it lets it pass unchanged to the viewer. And beyond it is that which is endless, changeless, comprehensive, as opposed to fickle expectations, as opposed to man's changing notions of paradise.

Presumably, the old men in the other great poem in *High Windows,* "The Old Fools," are the same as those who looked at Larkin "40 years back." The first stanza is a sequence of five biting rhetorical questions about old people, asking why they drool and piss themselves and behave so embarrassingly. The questions are addressed to no one; no answers are given. The stanza climaxes with the fifth question:

> "Why aren't they screaming?"

That, too, is left unanswered through the next three twelve-line stanzas, ticking on like a time-bomb.

Senescent dissolution—Larkin recognizes it as both physiological and social—begins when the old absent themselves from themselves ("At death, you break up:"). But those absences provide their own gauzy insulation. What follows is one of Larkin's splendid imaginative evocations:

> "Perhaps being old is having lighted rooms
> Inside your head, and people in them, acting.
> People you know, yet can't quite name; each looms

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Like a deep loss restored, from known doors turning,
Setting down a lamp, smiling from a stair...
That is where they live:
Not here and now, but where all happened once.
This is why they give
An air of baffled absence, trying to be there
Yet being here."

The question of why aren't they screaming is referred to with macabre comic matter-of-factness. "This must be what keeps them quiet."

Finally, that question's answer comes in the form of four more questions and one short statement (the symmetrical match of the first and last stanza is disrupted by the substitution of that final statement for what would have been the fifth and final question):

"Can they never tell
What is dragging them back, and how it will end? Not at night?
Not when the strangers come? Never, throughout
The whole hideous inverted childhood? Well,
We shall find out."

The question has always been addressed to the reader; the final line thrusts upon us the answer, and this is the only "we" that appears in "The Old Fools."

As a clerk of the factual, Larkin cannot falsify what he knows; his dogged integrity can lead him, also, to moments of generosity, moments beyond the reach of the first-hand that the generous imagination gropes for and, occasionally, carries us to. Something like this must be the religious impulse. In "Coming" from *The Less Deceived:*

"And I, whose childhood
Is a forgotten boredom,
Feel like a child
Who comes on a scene
Of adult reconciling,
And can understand nothing
But the unusual laughter,
And starts to be happy."

"Sad Steps" from *High Windows* is a poem addressed to the moon; after a bit of high-style poetic clowning ("Lozenge of love! Medallion of art!"), Larkin continues:

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"One shivers slightly, looking up there.
The hardness and the brightness and the plain
Far-reaching singleness of that wide stare

Is a reminder of the strength and pain
Of being young; that it can't come again,
But is for others undiminished somewhere."

Larkin is the dour unofficial poet laureate of Britishness. The most expressive public complaint in *High Windows* is "Going, Going," a polemic which bitterly puffs England's potential as "First slum of Europe." Larkin has evolved a dramatic vocabulary for futility, both social and ecological, with a cast of characters like "Mr. Bleaney" from *Whitsun Weddings,* or those young English mothers in "Afternoons" ("Their beauty has thickened./Something is pushing them/To the side of their own lives."), or the grumpy English provincial anti-Semite poet in "Posterity" in *High Windows* (Larkin's dramatic self-hatred goads this reader to respond in kind). There is also his qualified tribute to folk responsibility at a grubby English seaside resort, "To the Sea," and the moving "regenerate union" of another annual outing, "Show Saturday," both in *High Windows;* the train journeys in *Whitsun Weddings,* especially the great title poem; his informed poking around in out of the way places, as in the brilliant "Church Going" *(The Less Deceived)* and "An Arundel Tomb" *(Whitsun Weddings).*

Larkin's poetry is filled with the fine gratuities of poetic craft; the play of "guess" and "know," "endlessly" and "endless" in "High Windows"; the fatigue of that last line of "The Trees," "Begin afresh, afresh, afresh."; the small surprise in "The Building" as "the rest refit/Cups back to saucers;" his characteristic manner of holding off the qualifier till the end of a line ("Out to the car park, free." "down the long slide/To happiness, endlessly"; "and people in them, acting."); leaving a central question unanswered through an entire poem; the abbreviated social histories: "Who half the time were soppy-stern/And half at one another's throats" (the typical ellipsis of "And half"); the ambivalence in "Forget What Did" of the phrase "blank starting;" the bellows effect of that movement from low to high poetic voice; a break in stanza to spell out the absence in "The Old Fools"; "This is why they give/An air of baffled absence"; his extraordinarily animate lists ("Livings"; "Show Saturday").

It is odd but illuminating that Larkin, the most classical of our major poets in his use of meter and rhyme and his devotion to the dramatic monologue, Browning's great poetic innovation, should be so much more contemporary than many avowed experimentalists. This is partly because of

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his uncompromising, antiromantic personality, which insists on directness and clarity and minimal poetic inflation. And it is partly because that hard-won clarity possesses such capacities for startling elegance. The power and mobility of Larkin's contemporary idiom has enabled him to by-pass the problem of what critics once called the lack of a high-style in English poetry. Larkin has reached that fabulous stage at which words and readers obey his call.

ROBERT SEIDMAN

LOWELL'S CASTLE

PITY THE MONSTERS: The Political Vision of Robert Lowell. By Alan Williamson. Yale University Press. $10.00.

The proliferation of scholarly studies devoted to living authors is a dreary phenomenon, promoting as it does the claims of pure academic criticism at the expense of a more engaged, less consciously professional mode of discourse. Authors still in the midst of their careers are becoming hostages to the PhD system, which subjects them to the rigors of *explication de texte,* itself all that is left of the New Criticism. Most of these books are undistinguished, and I can't imagine who reads them. It seems that only in turning to a writer's own contemporaries or active practitioners of his art does one find genuine criticism; perhaps competition alone can elicit the keenest intelligence.

In the case of Robert Lowell, several dispiriting books have so far appeared, none of which have anything in common with Alan Williamson's new study; for his *Pity the Monsters* is a work of original, imaginative clarification, full of brilliant argument and dense with intuition. Apart from John Berryman's commentary on "Skunk Hour" and Randall Jarrell's review of *Lord Weary's Castle,* Williamson's is the most sympathetic (in the sense of affinity no less than praise) evaluation we have of Lowell and by far the most sustained. His readings of individual poems are so thorough and elaborate that one often suspects them of being more realized than the

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poems themselves; so taken is he with the ambiguities implicit in all of Lowell's work, the complex modulations of his many poetic voices, that Williamson often abandons the scrupulous examination of a poem for exhilarating speculations about its deepest social meanings.

There are, of course, risks involved in such speculations; in this instance, though, the poems invite them, require that even their most subliminal content be explored. We have become accustomed now to reading contemporary imaginative literature as autobiography; it is a habit of mind that works of supposedly deliberate artifice like *Lord Weary's Castle* induce in us no less than *Life Studies,* if only because authors can no longer depend on being shielded by literary convention from the inclement climate of psychoanalysis. To follow such a course leads easily to the sort of insinuation and veiled gossip that vitiates Philip Cooper's book on *The Autobiographical Myth of Robert Lowell.* Alan Williamson, while establishing necessary connections between Lowell's poems and what is known of his personal life, does so only to plot the nature and origins of those conflicts which provide a unified motif in the span of Lowell's work. This he has accomplished with remarkable tact, calling as much on Lowell's literary sources (Jonathan Edwards, Marvell, the many Biblical analogues) as on the specifically biographical, so that his book provides both textual exegesis and sudden inspirations. Lowell's poetry demands the latter; only flights of invention combined with a sort of grand architectonic view of human history can really hope to exhaust his virtual infinitude of nuance.

Williamson's organizing notion, stated at the very beginning, is to mean by political "the collective shaping of human destiny—ranging from the pressure of a family on an anarchic individual to the cumulative action of almost the entire human race in the current crisis of technology and ecology." Well, he certainly gives himself ample enough latitude to say what he wants; and yet there is a thematic principle at work in *Pity the Monsters,* one that advances parallel to Lowell's own development. In its most generalized form, this principle could be identified as a mediation between the properties of our mental world, imagination, will, desire, and the manner in which these properties impose themselves on reality. Put another way, it is the rude, urgent impulses of the unconscious that direct us toward our inevitable, biologically determined actions; in even the collective sense, "character is fate."

All of this Williamson documents in his long chapter on *Lord Weary's Castle,* which here receives the most intimate, comprehensive discussion I know of; to him it seems "as deeply and rewardingly personal a book as *Life Studies,*" an opinion he persuasively puts forward by looking to the poem's hidden motives more than to their overt religious material. In this way,

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"The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" discloses an obsession with guilt and human violence, a "new stress on Darwinian inevitabilities," and a "Faustian drive to know and control the fundamental causes of the material world." Such interpretive strategies, and (for once in literary criticism) a judicious use of Freud, allow him to propose that "Lowell's Catholicism seems involved in the desire to see the world reshaped by the force of his visions"; this, to Williamson, is the most notable feature of Lowell's greatness, for it implies some nearly talismanic power over otherwise intransigent reality.

From *Lord Weary's Castle,* he turns to *Life Studies,* about which he has much to say of interest; but these poems have been so assimilated into recent literary consciousness that no discussion of them could hope to be very startling. It is in the following chapter, on *For the Union Dead,* that Williamson's most concentrated, eloquent remarks occur. Using for illumination Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death,* Williamson amplifies Lowell's already devastating evocations of apocalypse and the spiraling alienation of man from the natural world to arrive at a profound gloss of the poem's concluding stanzas:

> Protected from the knowledge of his animality and mortality by the spurious permanence and orderliness of the machine-world, man becomes not only more powerful, but also more dangerous, because he is spared direct responsibility: he is so shielded from the horror of reality that he can not only commit the Hiroshima bombing, but then use it to advertise a safe.

This ability to move from Lowell's metamorphic statements (in lines so well-known that we tend to blur their import) toward generalizing ideas of great power is rare in criticism; to succeed in it requires both feeling and audacity.

These qualities show themselves to particular advantage in the chapters on *Near the Ocean* and *Notebook,* where Williamson's appraisals are more controversial and demand persuasion. Both these books drew considerable criticism, from which perhaps only the polemical energies of an openly partisan reader can extricate them. Williamson, convinced that *Near the Ocean* "cannot ultimately fail to be recognized as a major poem," alternates between the notation of his own responses, stated with restraint, and a sustained hermeneutics, in which the poem's deliberations over change and stasis, political chaos and individual experience, are explored. For one who

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feels, as I do, that *Near the Ocean* is not a wholly successful book, Williamson's argument is valuable, for it involves no less than a revaluation of Lowell's entire work, in which each successive innovation represents the further development of a single enterprise: to articulate "the power and brutality, the discontent, the helpless participation in sweeping historical forces that he knows about concretely and can give a particular artistic shape."

Williamson's critical faculties are taxed even more in his defense of *Notebook,* if only because its virtues are less evident than those of Lowell's earlier works. Here Williamson is least effective, and must resort to emphasizing the "bardic" character of the poem, placing it rather tenuously in a tradition of Blakean visionary politics. Such a solution is not entirely satisfactory, given the overly self-revelatory tendencies of *Notebook;* and it leads Williamson to some fanciful, even banal and labored justifications.

Still, the great value of *Pity the Monsters* resides in its unified argument, the creative intensity and purposiveness with which its author has elucidated the genuine grandeur of Lowell's career. Perhaps the most convincing sign of its success is that it sends us inevitably back to the poems themselves and with a new sense of their urgent, pitiless truth.

JAMES ATLAS

FREUD AND FEMINISM

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FEMINISM: Freud, Reich, Laing, and Women. By Juliet Mitchell. Pantheon. $10.00.

In America, psychonalysis has paid a price for being accepted by psychiatry. Its popularization has meant a general focus on psychotherapy and, as Juliet Mitchell notes, on adjustment to social prescriptions. Nevertheless, though Mitchell clearly understands the importance of social as well as psychological forces, she seems to me to exaggerate the conservative impact of psychoanalysis in this country. For if psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically oriented therapy has, as she claims, helped readapt discontented women to a subordinate status, she would have to show that in England, where psychoanalysis did not enjoy a similar popularity, women were less adapted to the traditional feminine role during the two decades

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following World War II than they were in this country. Actually, though, Mitchell's treatment of American psychoanalysis occupies only a small fraction of the book, and is to be understood as part of her critique of the revisionists who, she believes, did not do justice to Freud's unique contribution to the theory of the unconscious.

Among the neo-freudians she selects for discussion are Reich and Laing, I assume because they have followers among feminist radicals who criticize Freud from the left. Mitchell shows that in spite of the sophistication of these theorists, they minimize the importance of the oedipus complex, which, Mitchell holds, is the key to understanding the universality and persistence of patriarchal society. Laing removes the stigma of schizophrenia from the patient only to attach the stigma of sickness to patients' families, thus diverting attention from the link between the patriarchic structure of the family and society. As to Reich, Mitchell shows that although he saw the family as the mediator between society and the individual, recognized the influence of culture on sexual traits, and explained the masochism of women as a result of their abuse as sexual objects and of their economic dependence, his work is based on a fundamental misconception of the unconscious. To Reich, the unconscious is pure libido, and socialization is achieved through the repression of sexuality in the biological sense, by the development of conscious moral prohibitions. Thus Reich fails to recognize the interplay between drives and the complex of patriarchal relationships.

To Mitchell, the assumptions and theories of Reich and Laing and many of the other Freudian revisionists do not really confront the questions of the persistence and apparent universality of patriarchy which Mitchell sees as the central framework of women's oppression.

According to Mitchell, Freud explains this persistence by establishing the link between the concept of infantile sexuality and the social structure of patriarchal society. The power of patriarchy derives from the oedipus complex, that is, from the collective notion that incestuous wishes will be punished by the father. This establishes the father's authority to punish and hence his power over the young and over women.

It is this collective notion that legitimizes existing social arrangements, and through them imprints in our minds what Mitchell calls the mental representation of patriarchy. This conceptualization is, in my opinion, the most powerful contribution in her theorizing for it implies a much more basic formation of the human mind than a mere "influence" on or "stimulus" to people's thinking. Patriarchal arrangements are seen as part of the order of the universe, much like space and time, and cannot be easily eradicated by some counter-influence or competing

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ideology. They derive their strength not only from psychologically determining forces active since early childhood, but also from the basic principle of society, the principle of the incest taboo. It is here that the social and the psychological meet. Not only do they reinforce each other, but they are interdependent.

To develop this point, Mitchell invokes Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship structure. Lévi-Strauss holds that human society depends on social exchange, which can be assured only through the incest taboo which dictates that fathers and brothers shall give up their daughters and sisters, offering them to other groups who in turn bestow their own women. No other exchange in society, according to Lévi-Strauss, no matter how important, is as reliable and can be so firmly institutionalized as the exchange of women and the accompanying exchange of goods, values, and sentiments. Exchange through marriage is a total social act, economic, moral, and legal. The oedipus complex is the psychic mechanism of the incest taboo, which leads to the exchange of women.

In linking Freud's theory to a theory of social structure, however, Mitchell faces a major difficulty which she does not acknowledge. Having established theoretically the principle of patriarchy as the touchstone of human society, both socially and as a universal psychic structure, she has the problem of reconciling this with her feminism. She attempts this reconciliation with a radical notion: the abolition of the nuclear family in some future society.

Her argument rests mainly on Marx's theory of pauperization of the masses and on Lévi-Strauss's concept of social exchange. She states that, just as according to Marx, "under capitalism the vast majority of the population...has nothing to sell but its labour power, it also has nothing to exchange but this." Without anything to exchange, she concludes, there is no reason, except that of serving the interests of capitalist society, for the existence of the nuclear family.

But Mitchell's tour de force in rescuing Freud for feminism by making the nuclear family wither away like the Marxist state, actually results in the withering away of Freud himself. And she misrepresents Lévi-Strauss by restricting exchange to material goods. His main point, which he repeats over and over again in the *Structures élémentaires de la parenté,* is that marital exchange is a total social act, by which he means an undifferentiated social act. It is at the same time legal, social, and moral, in that the patterned exchange of women gives rise to an exchange of sentiments, commitments, and social values as well as to a material exchange. Thus, even if Marx were right that the majority of people have nothing to sell but their labor, this notion could not be applied directly to Lévi-Strauss's theory of exchange

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without doing violence to it. Nor can it be said that people have nothing to exchange but their labor power, for people have daughters and sisters to exchange. But what is more important is that resources other than property are exchanged through marriage. They include, for example, social networks which offer, if not always opportunities, at least mutual support, moral, social, and emotional.

Even if, as Mitchell implies, the image of patriarchy is more firmly rooted in the minds of men and women than any ideology, she underestimates the changes in attitudes and outlook produced by changes in the form and kinds of work people do. After all, even our sense of time and space has changed with the way Western societies have chosen to make use of the airplane. In the past, the principle of patriarchy, deriving its psychological strength from the incest taboo, which gave legitimacy to the power of *fathers* (not just *men,* as Mitchell rightly notes), had also a social justification in an economy of scarcity in which more people had to be produced to work for survival. But where childbearing could not or should not be controlled, and where consistent physical strength was a prerequisite for an important part of production, women had neither the time nor the strength to become mainstays in the productive system. Margaret Mead states this well: "As long as women were given the principal responsibility for the care of small children, and this responsibility included breast feeding and the need to have many children if a few were to survive, and as long as the great majority of males had to devote themselves to lifelong maintenance of households in which children were reared, an educational system which reared all females to be wives and mothers and almost all males to be husbands and fathers characterized every human society." It is only recently that, through a combination of developments in industrial society, the division of labor based on sex has become largely unnecessary, and undesirable, from the point of view either of our values or of efficiency.

To be sure, the technology of birth control or the technology of household appliances does not ipso facto change the nature of relationships between men and women. For several decades, women in industrial society have had the opportunity to exercise birth control and have had household technology at their disposal without there being any noticeable change in their position in the home. But something else has happened during those decades in the relations of production. Quietly, before the mass media took notice, women went to work; until, at present, forty percent of the U.S. labor force consists of women. More important is the fact, as Valerie Oppenheimer has shown, that during the two decades following World War II, the demand for female labor has risen sharply, the process of industrialization having fostered the growth

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of sex-typed female occupations, namely clerical and service; at the same time the supply of women available to the labor force in the past, the unmarried and the young, declined for reasons, among others, of early marriage and prolonged education. Hence the hiring of women could no longer be limited to the unmarried and the childless. As an increasing number of married women and women with children entered the labor force, and as going to work for women became both desirable (because of the pressure of consumption on the part of industry) and possible (because of the existence of mechanical aids for the household), something changed in their relations with men. The society is now so mechanized that women can operate overhead cranes, and it is so industralized that men can open up frozen food packages because goods needed for the household are produced outside of it. In other words, as society became more differentiated and specialized, roles within the nuclear family could become less differentiated and less specialized. And even if population experts today tell us that the population explosion is not as big a scare as it seemed to be a few years ago, the idea of women's role as mainly that of reproduction has been seriously undermined.

With a changing role in reproduction and a change in relations within the family and in the world of work, and a changing economy within the household, the structure of the family, including its authority relations, is about to change again, just as it has been subjected to changes in the past. With this change can come a change in the oedipal constellation and hence in what Mitchell calls the mental representation of patriarchy.

This leaves open, of course, as does Mitchell's notion of the familyless society, the whole question of identification and superego formation, as being based solely on the role of the father as a punishing figure, and related to this, Freud's view that the struggle between nature and culture is irreconcilable. There is no need to go into this aspect of the psychoanalytic view of the oedipus complex and infantile sexuality which has been the subject of an enormous literature, both polemical and theoretical. But, as I have been arguing, even if one grants the validity or the usefulness of the Freudian position, there are still serious problems in applying it to the concerns of feminism. Our main task is perhaps to examine the nature of the social relations which affect the development of psychic structures and, in turn, are affected by them. In fact, social relations may so change as to weaken the formation of the oedipus complex even within the nuclear family.

ROSE LAUB COSER

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WRITERS' CHOICE

LESLIE EPSTEIN: For two years now I have been reading about the destruction of European Jews. It has been, of course, a heart-stopping experence; what it has done to me — already I note with dismay how ridiculously moved I become at the least kindly act (such a thing sometimes happened) by a Rumanian, a Ukrainian, a Pole — I won't know for many years more. The first-person accounts are always the best. They cease being worthwhile only when — rarely — they stop telling, or start embroidering, the truth. The diaries, the records kept on the spot, buried in oil cans, smuggled outside, are the steadiest and least hysterical of modern history books. Some (Ringelblum, Kaplan, Anne Frank) are well known. Here are three others, books by or about children: *Young Moshe's Dairy*, by the solemn-faced Moshe Flinker, his eyes lost behind the wire-framed spectacles of some grown-up person; *The Dairy of the Vilna Ghetto*, by Yitzhak Rudashevski, whose two passions, if I remember correctly, were the Red Army and his *gimnazye* teacher, Gershteyn, who in the course of things died ("How beautifully, with what youthfulness he used to go up the school steps, carrying his rubbers in his hands and his cane!"); and *The Diary of Adam's Father*, written over a single summer by Aryeh Klonicki, hidden in a wheat field — Adam himself, a few months old, was in a farmhouse nearby; he survived his father by a year or so, and then seems to have been abandoned by the same Polish couple who, after the war, in order to obtain Care packages from Klonicki's brother, kept hinting, hinting, hinting that the boy was yet alive.

These three diaries were all printed, a little clumsily, in Israel, by small publishers (Ghetto Fighters House is the name of one). The best place to read them is in the YIVO library, up on the second floor. There are old chandeliers there, with crystal drops bigger than the hidden lightbulbs. The books come up a dumbwaiter inside of a lady's purse. The windows overlook 86th Street and Central Park. Keep your coat on, it's chilly. And — this is a *Jewish* library — noisy, too. Dina Abramowicz, the librarian, elderly now, and about four and a half feet tall, talks in a normal tone of voice. But what conversations! "Tell me, Mister Epstein," she says, pointing to a hump-backed peddler on the cover of a new children's book, "in your opinion is this a Jewish stereotype?"

"Absolutely!" This from a

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scholar a table away. "Not a doubt!"

This skilled, intelligent woman turns aside. Her accent is thick, Lithuanian. "Why do they do this? It's a world of horror." I do not think I am mistaken in saying that she lived through the Ghetto of Vilna.

Two more books, please. *Kaputt*, by Curzio Malaparte, once rather famous, now hardly known. The author spent much of the war as a journalist behind fascist lines. His descriptions of pogroms in Rumania are full of insight and humanity; but the best of the book is set in Finland, where Nazis beat themselves inside of steambaths and horses crystalize, mineralize, in ice and sugary snow. And last, Jacob Presser's *The Destruction of the Dutch Jews*, because in it, in microcosm, in little Holland, we learn everything we need to know about the big world of horror that is still spinning around.

RICHARD ELMAN: *Coming Through Slaughter* by Michael Ondaatje (Ananse, Toronto) is such a brilliant account of the artist as mark, and of the friends who use him to achieve those pleasures and pains his work, then, echoes and signifies, that I find it to be one of the most original and enthralling new novels I have ever read.

Ondaatje's subject is the first of the great broken-hearted jazz trumpeter greats, barber Buddy Bolden. His prose accommodates the jazz riff's intricacy and passion and steps beyond it into understanding; it moves like fugitives in the night; it's fast, slow, not arty, but clear, simple, clean, just, like a knife wound, Renata Adlerish, in format, but wedded to a subject.

Ondaatje's methods are mixed: scene, collage, internal monologue. He mixes his blacks with whites as is appropriate to an original novel of voice about the paranoias of a Creole society, and he has the courage to tell the whole story, as an artist must.

Young novelists like Ondaatje (who has also written about Billy the Kid) remind us how we are all helpless in the meantime to do anything less than try to be empathic and careful and passionate, as he is in *Coming Through Slaughter*.

JANE RICHMOND: When Richard P. Brickner was twenty, he cracked up the MG he was driving on a spring day and broke his neck. Put back in a "crib" again, "a hairy baby," and much later in a wheelchair, for life, he has to begin his life another time, domesticating a wild reality, until it can come up to him, years later and eat out of his hand, sometimes.

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Mr. Brickner in his book, *My Second Twenty Years: An Unexpected Life,* (Basic Books), has transformed pain into art in a tone so clinically matter of fact that one is caught with one's emotions down, unprepared, surprised by the odd and powerful knockout that has just been delivered.

Although the author may sometimes fall in his apartment, and lie on the floor helpless, waiting, "as calmly as if I were reading," for the police to show up and help him back into his wheelchair, although he can never take a walk for a paper, never take a walk for a breath of fresh air, never walk against the light, we feel no sorrier for him, a gifted, funny, sexy, uncareless man, than we do for ourselves—for the accidents that will have happened to all of us if we live long enough and decide that we are life prone enough, and ardent enough to continue living.

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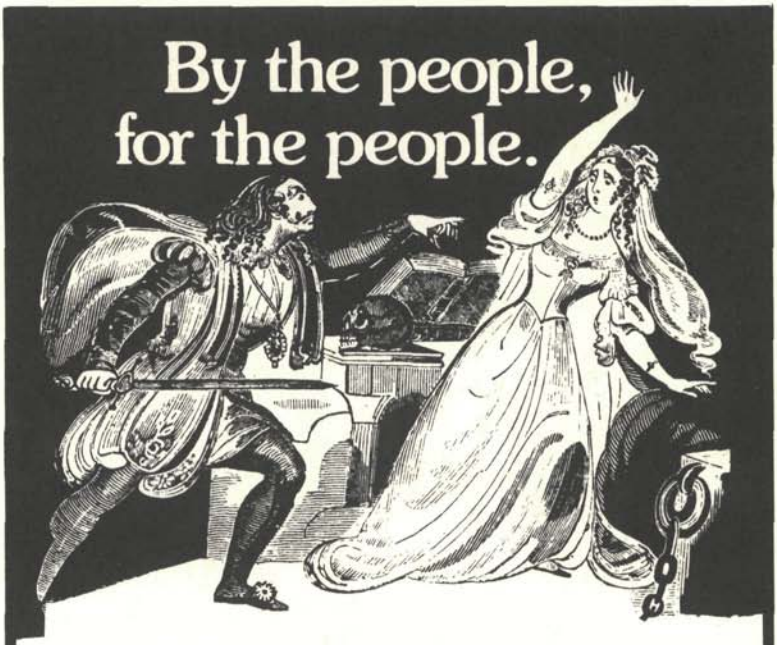

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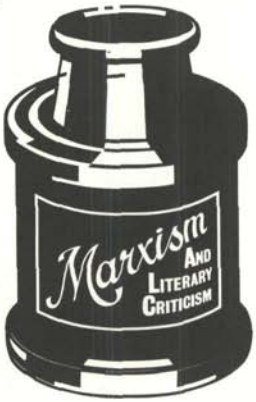

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